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ABSTRACT

This review of primarily Canadian literature summarizes what is known about the access of youth age 10-15 years to structured recreational activities and the effects of these activities. Data come from literature reviews and reference documents on the subject of recreation, leisure, or physical activity as well as books on the subject. Researchers also conducted interviews with two experts in the field. This paper begins by examining the Laidlaw Foundation's four major hypotheses about the policy significance of youth recreation (human development, civic competence, insufficiency, and inadequacy), suggesting that these hypotheses can be conceived as two aspects of the relationship between youth and recreation (the impact of recreation on the biological, social, emotional, and civic development of youth and social, economic, cultural, and political factors that are barriers to youth participation). The review examines all studies that establish the minimum levels of participation necessary to generate positive outcomes and that report on the social correlates of participation rates (or vice versa). It discusses barriers to recreation and their impact on youth participation rates. Results suggest that structured recreation offers positive physical, psychological, and social benefits (Contains 130 bibliographic references.) (SM)

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Literature Review on Learning through Recreation

Caroline Beauvais

Introduction

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Canadian Policy Research Networks
600-250 Albert Street
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Introduction

There is virtually unanimous agreement on the importance of recreation in developing the physical, psychological and social abilities of children and youth. The trust placed in recreation as a factor affecting personal development is often based on personal experience. Everyone can refer to their own experiences to appreciate the effects of recreation on their own well-being. But beyond first impressions and vague intuitions, there is a scientific literature that for several decades has been substantiating the crucial role played by recreation in the development of children and youth, which has expanded continuously and brought some conceptual clarification to this field of knowledge.

Some health and social science studies focus on the contribution of recreation to fostering the biological development and moral, social and civic activities of youth. Other studies start from the assumption that recreation has a beneficial effect on youth, and then identify the social, economic, political and cultural factors that inhibit access to and participation in recreational activities by young people. Our literature review will be based on these two approaches to the relationship between youth and recreational activity. It will first examine the effects of recreation on the physical and psychosocial development of youth, and then review the factors affecting participation by young people in recreation activities. To begin, we will define the scope of the literature covered and demarcate the boundaries of our research.

Structuring the Literature Review – Scope and Focus

This literature review will summarize what we know about the access of young people between 10 and 15 years of age to structured recreational activities, and the effects of these activities. Fitness Canada defines recreation as comprising all socially acceptable activities in which a person may choose to take part that will make his or her leisure time more interesting, more enjoyable, and personally satisfying (McKay, *et al.*, 1996: 284). There are many forms of recreation – reading, playing sports, engaging in artistic pursuits, hanging out, camping, making music in a group, surfing the Web, and so on. We view *structured recreation* as a significantly smaller subset of recreation, which consists of recreational activities involving elements of instruction, choice and skill development.[1]

Structured recreation is this kind of recreation that will be considered in this literature review. Our definition sets aside individual or family-based forms of recreation, as well as forms of recreation which are interpersonal but do not involve instruction or skill development.[2] The reason for delimiting our interest in this way is that our first goal is to identify the impact of *organized recreational activities outside the home* on the transition from youth to adulthood. Our second goal is to analyze the broad social consequences of choices made by public authorities about the distribution of recreational resources, about who has access to them, at what cost and in what circumstances.

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1 This is the definition found in the Laidlaw Foundation document entitled *Learning through Recreation* (2000).

2 *Learning through Recreation* also mentions *interpersonal recreation*, defined as activities involving pleasure-related choices and interpersonal interactions. We believe that this definition encompasses too broad a range of activities to be assessed in this review.

This literature review is primarily an overview rather than an exhaustive inventory of the literature. We are endeavouring to organize the literature around specific issues characteristic of the way young people relate to recreation. We have given priority to Canadian literature, bearing in mind that the handful of existing literature reviews on this topic do not take into account the national origins of the studies' authors. Sifting out the Canadian literature from the copious American literature seemed a useful exercise; however, this is not common practice. We decided to introduce foreign studies wherever it appeared that they would contribute to a particular topic, or wherever relevant Canadian literature was sparse or even silent on the topic. Thus, the foreign literature sheds light on the gaps in the Canadian literature, and suggests new avenues to be explored within the framework of future research in Canada. Noting gaps in the literature is just as important as itemizing what is already available on the topic. Therefore, we will conclude each section by enumerating the gaps in knowledge so as to guide future research in the area of youth and recreation.

We have decided to examine only the scientific literature, that is to say, the literature originating within research institutes or universities. Some reports published by governments or by private or public organizations will also be taken into account when they are scientific in character or when, as a result of their impact on new programs or new orientations, they have left their imprint on the field. We will also give priority to recent studies (from 1990 on). At the same time, however, we note less recent studies that are still considered important. Unless a historical review is necessary for an understanding of the issue at hand, we have neither employed an historical approach nor documented the evolution of the issue.

To do this literature review, we used several sources to find the documents that could be of some relevance. First, we identified literature reviews and any reference documents that already exist on the subject of recreation, leisure or physical activity. Books such the *Conclusions of The 1992 International Consensus Symposium on Physical Activity, Fitness, and Health* (Bouchard, Shepard and Stephens, 1994), *Sport in Society* (Coakley, 2001), *Benefits of Leisure* (Driver, Brown and Peterson, 1991), *Benefits and Impact of Physical Activity for Ontario* (Craig, Russell and Cameron, 1995), *Overcoming Systemic Barriers to Access in Active Living* (Donnelly and Harvey, 1996) were useful for assessing the existing state of knowledge.

Interviews were also conducted with two experts in the field: Robin Wright, Assistant Professor at The School of Social Work, McGill University; and Jean Harvey, Professor, School of Human Kinetics at Ottawa University. These experts directed us to more detailed research findings. We used also databanks such as *Sport Discuss* and many others in the social sciences to find relevant articles and scientific reviews. The goal was a synthetic literature review of published academic studies of youth and structured recreation that would help the Laidlaw Foundation identify research gaps and research needs for the future in Canada. Therefore, we have put the emphasis on documents and articles that reflect the current field of knowledge in Canada, without claiming this is an exhaustive review of the subject.

We will now take a closer look at the relationship between youth and recreation.

The Two Dimensions of the Relationship between Youth and Recreation

The Laidlaw Foundation (1999) identified four major hypotheses concerning the policy significance of youth recreation. They are:

1. ***The Human Development Hypothesis*:** The absence of structured recreation for youth negatively affects the long run socio-emotional human development of youth as adults.

2. ***The Civic Competence Hypothesis*:** The absence of involvement by youth in interpersonal recreation activities affects an individual's future civic competence and also affects the quality of democracy.

3. ***The Insufficiency Hypothesis*:** Significant numbers of youth are not participating in recreation activities at levels sufficient to support their human development and future civic competence.

4. ***The Inadequacy Hypothesis*:** Non-participation by youth in recreation and arts activities can be related to the inadequacy of existing public systems dealing with the provision of youth recreation.

We think that these hypotheses can be conceived as two aspects of the relationship between youth and recreation. The first dimension of this relationship is the impact of recreation on the biological, social, emotional and civic development of youth. The second dimension of the relationship consists of social, economic, cultural and political factors that are barriers to participation by youth. The first aspect of the relationship responds to the *Human Development Hypothesis* (#1), the *Civic Competence Hypothesis* (#2), and the *Insufficiency Hypothesis* (#3) identified in *Learning in Recreation* (Laidlaw, 1999). The second corresponds to a part of the *Civic Competence Hypothesis* (#2), but primarily assesses the *Inadequacy Hypothesis* (#4).

Laidlaw's hypotheses are framed in the negative, only considering the *absence* of participation in structured recreation. However, the literature review considers relationships between outcomes and *both* non-participation *and* participation. Looking only at *absence* would leave too many unanswered questions.

Figure 1
Possible Relationships between Recreation and Outcomes

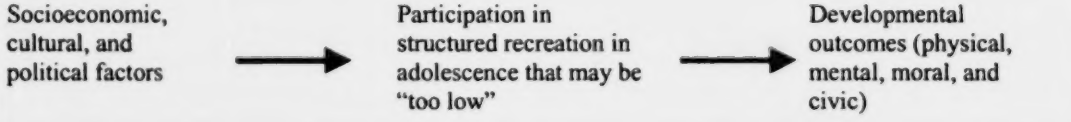
Participation in structured recreation in adolescence
The physical development of individuals (biological and physical development)
The psychosocial development of individuals (psychological, social, moral and civic development)

As we said, the first dimension of this relationship is the impact of recreation on the biological, social, emotional and civic development of youth. The central issue here is whether participation in structured recreation during adolescence affects the physical and psychosocial development of individuals. Our literature review canvasses the published literature for research studies confirming or invalidating the two relationships set out graphically in Figure 1. The arrows indicate our expectation of a possible correlation between the two factors, although not necessarily a causal relationship.

We will also attempt to establish the level of participation required to obtain specific results. In this literature, we distinguish short-term from long-term impacts to find out the following: (1) if the two types of impacts show similarities; (2) if some impacts emerge only over the long term; and (3) if certain impacts quickly fade following participation in an activity.

The second dimension of the relationship between youth and recreation consists of social, economic, cultural and political factors that are barriers to participation by youth. A number of correlates of the patterns of participation generate (at least in some parts of the adolescent population) a level of participation that is too low to produce positive outcomes in either physical or psychosocial development. The possible structure of the relationship can be represented graphically, as in Figure 2.

Figure 2
The Possible Structure of the Relationship Involving Circumstances of Youth Participation and Outcomes


Socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors
Participation in structured recreation in adolescence that may be "too low"
Developmental outcomes (physical, mental, moral, and civic)

Therefore, the literature review will examine all studies that establish the minimum levels of participation necessary to generate positive outcomes, and that report on the social correlates of rates of participation (or vice versa). We will examine the barriers to recreation identified in the literature and their impact on youth participation rates in structured recreational activities. If literature exists on the topic, we will attempt to establish if low participation affects the development of youth.

The literature review is organized around the two dimensions of the relationship between youth and recreation, as noted above. Each dimension is discussed in a separate section. Each part begins by introducing and summarizing the field of study and ends by identifying the inadequacies of the literature in the field.

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CANADIAN POLICY RESEARCH NETWORKS INC.
600-250 ALBERT OTTAWA ONTARIO K1P 6M1
TEL: (613) 567-7500 FAX: (613) 567-7640

Canadian Council on Social Development /
Conseil canadien de développement social
441 MacLaren, 4th/e Floor/Étage
Tél. : (613) 236-8977 Fax : (613) 236-2750
Ottawa, ON K2P 2H3 Internet : www.ccsd.ca

Four Hypotheses about the Public Policy Significance of Youth Recreation:

Lessons from a Literature Review and a Data Analysis on "Learning through Recreation"

Joint Summary Report of a *Data Analysis: Learning through Recreation* prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) and a *Literature Review on Learning through Recreation* prepared by the Family Network of Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) for the Laidlaw Foundation, June 2001.

The Genesis of this Research

In December 2000, the Laidlaw Foundation commissioned the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) and the Family Network of Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) to conduct a joint research project on recreation for young people. The research produced two detailed reports on different aspects of the subject:

- A *Data Analysis: Learning through Recreation* was prepared by Andrew Jackson, Paul Roberts and Shelley Harman of the Canadian Council on Social Development, and
- A *Literature Review on Learning through Recreation* was prepared by Caroline Beauvais of the Family Network of Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Based on these two reports, CCSD and CPRN prepared this Joint Summary Report of the findings.

Four Hypotheses about the Public Policy Significance of Youth Recreation:

Lessons from a Literature Review and a Data Analysis on "Learning Through Recreation"

In December 2000, the Laidlaw Foundation commissioned the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) and the Family Network of Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) to complete two studies about "Learning Through Recreation" that, together, could be used to inform the Foundation's future work in the area of youth recreation. CCSD produced *a Data Analysis: Learning Through Recreation*, while CPRN conducted a *Literature Review on Learning through Recreation*. This summary report combines the key findings of these two studies as they relate to four hypotheses about the public policy significance of youth recreation advanced by the Laidlaw Foundation. The data analysis and literature review are available as separate background documents that support and expand upon this summary report.

In 1999, the Laidlaw Foundation originally developed four major hypotheses concerning the policy significance of youth recreation:

1. ***The Human Development Hypothesis*:** The absence of structured recreation for youth negatively affects the long run socio-emotional human development of youth as adults.

2. ***The Civic Competence Hypothesis*:** The absence of involvement by youth in interpersonal recreation activities affects an individual's future civic competence and also affects the quality of democracy.

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4. ***The Inadequacy Hypothesis*:** Non-participation by youth in recreation and arts activities can be related to the inadequacy of existing public systems dealing with the provision of youth recreation.

Fitness Canada defines *recreation* as comprising all socially acceptable activities in which a person may choose to take part that will make his or her leisure time more interesting, more enjoyable, and personally satisfying (McKay, *et al.*, 1996: 284). There are many forms of recreation – reading, playing sports, engaging in artistic pursuits, hanging out, camping, making music in a group, surfing the Web, and so on. We view *structured recreation* as a significantly smaller subset of recreation, which consists of recreational activities involving elements of instruction, choice and skill development.[1]

[1] This is the definition found in the Laidlaw Foundation document entitled *Learning Through Recreation* (2000).

The nature and results of a Canadian literature review on youth recreation and an analysis of available data on the subject are summarized below. This is followed by an assessment of how these findings and empirical observations relate to the four hypotheses presented above, with respect to: (1) access to structured recreation; (2) impacts of recreation; and (3) research and policy implications.

The Nature and Overall Results of the Literature Review

The literature review summarizes what we know about the access of young people between 10 and 15 years of age to structured recreational activities, and the effects of these activities. We primarily examined the scientific literature, that is, the literature originating within research institutes or universities. Some reports published by governments or by private or public organizations were also taken into account when they were scientific in character or when, as a result of their impact on new programs or new orientations, they had left their imprint on the field. We also gave priority to recent studies (from 1990 on), while noting older works that are still considered important. We have also given priority to Canadian literature, but introduced foreign studies wherever it appeared that they would contribute to a particular topic, or wherever relevant Canadian literature was sparse or even silent on a topic. Thus, the foreign literature sheds light on the gaps in the Canadian literature, and suggests new avenues to be explored within the framework of future research in Canada.

To complete the literature review, we used several sources to find the documents that could be of some relevance. First, we identified literature reviews and any reference documents that already exist on the subject of recreation, leisure or physical activity.[2] Interviews were also conducted with two experts in the field: Robin Wright, Assistant Professor at The School of Social Work, McGill University; and Jean Harvey, Professor, School of Human Kinetics at Ottawa University. These experts directed us to more detailed research findings. We also used databanks such as *Sport Discuss* and others in the social sciences to find relevant articles and scientific reviews.

The goal was a synthetic literature review of published academic studies of youth and structured recreation that would help the Laidlaw Foundation identify research gaps and research needs for the future in Canada. Therefore, we have put the emphasis on documents and articles that reflect the current field of knowledge in Canada, without claiming this is an exhaustive review of the subject.

We organized the literature review around two aspects of the relationship between young people (aged 10 to 15 years) and structured recreation. The first consisted of identifying the effects of recreation on the physical and psychosocial development of youth, and the second involved identifying factors affecting youth participation in structured recreation.

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[2] Books such the *Conclusions of The 1992 International Consensus Symposium on Physical Activity, Fitness, and Health* (Bouchard, Shepard and Stephens, 1994), *Sport in Society* (Coakley, 2001), *Benefits of Leisure* (Driver, Brown and Peterson, 1991), *Benefits and Impact of Physical Activity for Ontario* (Craig, Russell and Cameron, 1995), and *Overcoming Systemic Barriers to Access in Active Living* (Donelly and Harvey, 1996) were useful for assessing the existing state of knowledge.

The link between the two was as follows: *If participating in structured recreation has a beneficial effect on the physical and psychosocial development of youth, then access to participation should be extended to all children.* In this regard, David Offord, Ellen Lipman and Eric Duku state, "The first issue that must be addressed in the policy domain is whether or not participation in sports, arts and community programs is beneficial for children. If it is not, then the issue of unequal participation rates in different subgroups of children should not be of concern" (1998: 24).

With respect to identifying the effects of recreation on the physical and psychosocial development of youth, we have observed a significant difference between the conclusions of the scientific literature and widespread notions about recreation as a factor in development. While the evidence relating to physical and biological outcomes is scientifically grounded, the evidence relating to psychosocial outcomes is much less so. We therefore obtain mixed results.

Due to the methodological weaknesses of available studies, many influential authors are reluctant to say that recreation produces positive (or negative) effects on personality development, moral development or social values. In part, of course, the deficiencies in the research stem from the nature of psychosocial development itself. It is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by many factors. Therefore, recreation is likely to have an essentially *indirect* impact on it.

It is apparent, however, that there are positive physical, psychological and social benefits to be derived from *structured recreation*. Authors in the field share a general assessment of the positive effects of structured recreation on youth development. Overall, the observation is that the relationship between youth recreation and benefits is more complex than we might expect, and researchers stress the need for additional research that will yield more conclusive results.

Indeed, if we agree that structured recreation can generate *positive* outcomes, we are much less confident about the conditions that will engender such benefits. Structured recreation does not necessarily lead automatically to positive outcomes, and the acquisition of benefits depends largely on participation in appropriate programs, and on the social environment in which the activity takes place. As Wankel and Berger (1991) remind us, it is futile to wonder whether sport is good or bad. Like many things, sport is neither good nor bad in itself but can produce positive and negative effects. Thus, the following questions must be asked. What are the conditions that will generate positive outcomes? What conditions should be avoided in order to minimize negative effects?

With regard to identifying factors affecting youth participation in structured recreation, it is important to recall that there are many overlaps in the literature that deals with barriers to participation. It seems that both *socioeconomic status* and *gender* are key determining factors for youth participation but others are also important, such as the organizational structure of recreational services and the influence of peers and parents. Yet authors have some difficulty weighting and categorizing these factors. For example, the variable of gender can confound our measures of the influence of peers or parents. Also, some constraints may be more important for some social categories of young people, and less so for others.

Again, the methodological deficiencies of the studies arise largely because of the difficulty of analyzing, not to mention isolating, some variables. The socioeconomic status variable, for example, is easier to observe than the diffuse, less tangible effects associated with gender.

There is a serious lack of research on the effects of publicly provided services on youth participation in structured recreational activities. Very few studies in Canada examine either if access to publicly supported recreation services affects participation in structured recreation in adolescence or if there are differences in participation according to socioeconomic status. However, recommendations for giving a greater number of young people access to recreation often originate in the study of constraints and barriers to youth participation. In general, authors call for greater flexibility in administering and developing recreational programs; enhanced accessibility to programs in terms of costs, transportation and availability; and, above all, greater awareness of the needs and desires of the principal stakeholders – youth.

The Nature and Overall Results of the Data Analysis

I. Access and Level of Activity

How children spend their recreational time is influenced by the access they have to particular recreational activities. Children have more control over choosing which unstructured activities they participate in, and greater access to unstructured recreational activities. Access to and participation in structured recreation, however, is constrained: coached and supervised activities require qualified adult supervision, instruction usually takes place at a particular locale requiring transportation and often involves a cost to participate. These are only some of the barriers to participation in recreation. Which children access structured recreation and how often they participate is related to a number of factors including income, gender, city size, and family structure. The National Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) developed in 1994 by Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, was used to examine the relationship between these factors and participation in structured recreation.

The 1996 cycle of the NLSCY included a questionnaire to be completed by children between the ages of 10 and 13. Included were a number of questions about participation in: organized team sports with a coach; dance and gymnastics classes; music and art lessons; clubs and community groups, such as cubs and brownies; and participation in overnight and day camps. The NLSCY also provides data on income, gender, family type and urban area size. Data from the National Population Health Survey (NPHS) and General Social Survey (GSS) were also used.

The Canadian Council on Social Development's report *Access to Recreation Programs in Canada* examines children's access to recreation programs across Canada. Information about barriers to participation was taken from this report and is attached to the *Data Analysis and Review: Learning Through Recreation* report.

II. Impacts of Structured Recreation

Participation in structured recreation has been shown to have an impact on child development in a number of ways. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) 1994 and 1996, the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP), the General Social Survey 1998 (GSS), and the National Population Health Survey (NPHS) 1996 and 1998, we were able to establish some links between recreation and physical development, psychosocial development and behaviour, civic behaviour and present and future civic competence.

Data on recreation and physical development and psychosocial behaviour were taken from the NLSCY, which sampled children between the ages of 10 and 13. The General Social Survey 1998 (GSS 1998), sampled Canadians 15 years of age and older on their time use, including how much time they spent participating in recreational activities and how much time they spent volunteering and participating in their community. To examine recreation, volunteering and community participation (civic competence in the present) of youth, we restricted the sample to youth ages 15 to 17.

Information about civic competence was derived from the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP), conducted by Statistics Canada in 1997. The NSGVP sampled respondents 15 years of age and older and asked them retrospective questions about their participation in recreational activities as children, and their current level of civic participation and involvement in their community. The NSGVP also questioned adults about their participation in team sports and youth groups.

III. Overall Conclusions of the Data Analysis

We found significant income barriers to equal participation in coached sports, and evidence of infrastructure barriers. We find evidence consistent with the argument that involvement in structured recreation promotes higher levels of social involvement and future civic competence.

Access to Structured Recreation – Correlates and Patterns

We can draw certain conclusions about *access* to structured recreation by age, gender, income, and a range of other factors, and according to barriers that prevent participation. The literature and quantitative data allows an analysis of three correlates of access.

Age: From the literature, we observe that children are more likely than adolescents to take part in and appreciate organized activities. As young people grow older, they are inclined to abandon organized activities in favor of informal activities. While it is true that participation in organized activities dramatically decreases with age for both genders, girls begin to withdraw from organized sport even earlier than boys do.

Gender: Compared to boys, girls seem less drawn to team sports and competition, and are more likely to participate in cultural and interpersonal activities. Girls cite substantially the same reasons as boys for engaging in physical activity, including personal enjoyment and companionship. Most authors ascribe differences in participation between boys and girls to deeper cultural factors associated with the production and reproduction of gender roles in recreational activities. Certain cultural norms seem to be internalized by girls in early childhood, discouraging them from developing their physical skills. Later on, as adults, these norms prevent them from enjoying physical activities that demand a higher level of physical skills. Although most authors concede that much progress has been made and that girls now have more opportunities to participate, disparities in participation rates and recreation choices persist. Girls are breaking into many sports once considered male bastions. However, boys are much more reluctant to engage in "typically feminine" activities.

The quantitative data analysis (NLSCY) also shows that gender influences the types of activities that children favour and in which they participate. Girls between the ages of 10 and 13 were slightly less likely to participate in sports with a coach; 22.7 per cent "never" participate compared to 18.9 per cent of boys. Boys were slightly more likely than girls to participate in coached sports on a more frequent basis (at least once a week). However, girls were much more likely to participate in dance or gymnastics and also more likely to participate in art, drama or music. Boys were also less likely to participate in scouts than girls in guides. Girls were slightly more likely to participate in overnight camp and both genders were equally likely to participate in day camp.

Income: The review of the literature found that young people identify lack of money and difficulty in accessing activities as major barriers to their participation. Researchers similarly identify economic inequalities as one of the major factors shaping patterns of youth participation. The number of barriers to recreational activities mentioned by young people decrease as family income rises. There are significant differences in levels of participation between youth from low-income families and those from middle- and high-income families. Participation in physical and artistic activities is particularly low and irregular for children from low-income families. The differences are greater for structured recreation and for recreation that requires elements of instruction or expensive equipment. Municipal recreation user fees discourage participation by youth from low-income families since costs are a more acute problem for them.

The data analysis shows the following. Participation in some recreational activities increased with income level while income had little or no impact on participation in other activities. Children from high income families and those living above the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) were much more likely to participate frequently in organized sports (i.e., sports with a coach) than children from lower income quintile families and those living below the LICO. Nearly three-quarters of children from the highest income quintile played sports with a coach one or more times per week compared to just over half (56.6 per cent) of children in the bottom quintile. Income had little or no impact on participation rates in dance or gymnastics. Sixty-two per cent of children living in households in the lowest income quintile had never participated in dance/gymnastics, compared to sixty-one percent of children from highest income quintile families.

Children from middle income families were slightly more likely to participate in art, drama or music and in guides or scouts, but there was little difference in participation rates between children living in households above and below the LICO.

Day camp and overnight camps are often relatively expensive structured recreational activities for children. As such, it is not surprising that children from higher income households and children living above the LICO were more likely to have attended overnight camp than were children from lower income households or those below the LICO. Participation in overnight camp increased with income quintile, with the largest proportion of children by far attending overnight camp being from the highest income quintile. Attendance in day camp also rose consistently with income quintile. Nearly half of the highest income quintile children had attended day camp the previous summer compared to just one-fifth of the lowest income quintile children. NPHS data also show large income impacts on participation in sports.

The Family Expenditure Survey (FAMEX), conducted by Statistics Canada in 1992, and the Survey of Household Spending (SHS) conducted in 1998, found that of all families with children, those with the lowest household incomes spent a higher proportion of their income on recreation. The lowest income households spent on average 7.5 per cent of their household income on recreation, while middle income earners spent 6.3 per cent of their income on recreation and the highest income earners spent only 5.8 per cent of their income on recreation. However, when percentage of household income is translated into a dollar value (per year), the lowest income group spent an average of $1,895 on recreation, the middle income group spent $3,413 and the highest income group spent $5,982. Participation in recreation for lower income families is at a greater expense than for higher income families, 7.5 per cent versus 5.8 per cent of their annual incomes, yet despite the greater proportion spent on recreation by lower income families the actual dollar value of their contribution is only a third of what is spent by high income families. This data suggests that lower income families recognize value in recreation and are willing to spend a significant portion of their income on recreation.

Other Factors: A number of other factors can also influence youth participation in structured recreation. These include urban/rural living, minority youth, time constraints, parental influence, family type, peer influence, and changing lifestyles. Each factor is discussed below.

- Urban/Rural Living: More often than not, inactive children and adolescents live in communities with fewer than 1,000 residents. Some research findings suggest that small municipalities are less successful than larger municipalities in meeting young people's needs for physical activities. The data show the following. Participation in structured recreation is highly dependent on availability and proximity to activities. Consequently, the size of the urban area in which children live can enhance or limit their opportunities to participate in structured recreation. Children living in urban areas were more likely to participate and to participate more frequently, in a greater number of activities than children living in rural areas. Moreover, as the size of the urban area increases, so does the likelihood of participation in coached sports, dance or gymnastics and in art, drama, or music lessons.

Urban area size had less of an impact on participation rates in guides/scouts; participation was only very slightly higher in large cities (26.4 per cent) than in smaller cities (26.1 per cent) or rural areas (24.8 per cent). Children from larger cities were just slightly more likely to participate in overnight camp, followed by children living in rural areas, children from smaller cities were the least likely to participate in overnight camp. However, children from rural areas were much less likely to attend day camp than children form larger urban areas. (NLSCY).

- Minority Youth: Young immigrants, Aboriginal youth, and youth with disabilities face particular and additional barriers to participation in structured recreation.

- Time Constraints: Many youth identify lack of time and competitive time demands as barriers to their participation.

- Parental Influence: Active youth are more likely than inactive youth to have parents who participate in sport. Parental influence varies according to the type of recreation. Parents have more influence over the organized recreational activities of their children than over their non-organized recreational activities.

- Family Type: Family type seems to affect children's participation in structured recreation. Children from two-parent families were somewhat more likely to participate in coached sports and to attend day camp than children from single parent families. This is likely attributable in significant part to income differences. Children from two-parent families were also slightly more likely to have participated in art/drama/music and to have attended overnight camp than children from single parent families. However, there was little difference in participation in guides/scouts and dance/gymnastics between children from single parent or two-parent families. (NLSCY)

  The NPHS found that youth from higher income households (greater than $60,000 per year) were much more likely to participate in group sports than youth from the low-income households (less than $10,000 per year). More than three-quarters (75.5 per cent) of youth from the higher income households participated in grouped sports, compared to less than half (46.1 per cent) of youth from low income households. There is a strong relationship between family type and household income. Two-parent households are much more likely to have higher household incomes than one-parent families, which in turn impacts the participation levels of children from two-parent and one-parent families.

- Peer Influence: Peers could represent barriers as well as motivators to youth participation in structured recreation.

- Changing Lifestyles: Many young people are now replacing structured or organized sports with alternative, non-structured, participant-controlled recreation. This new trend appears to go beyond physical activities, as demonstrated by the popularity of the Internet and video.

Infrastructural Barriers: In a Canadian study, the presence of good parks, playgrounds, and play spaces in the neighbourhood was strongly associated with increased rates of participation in supervised sports and, a lesser extent, in unsupervised sports and the arts. Forms of service delivery can affect youth participation in structured recreation. Organizational constraints often involve a failure to attend to the needs and wants of youth with regard to recreational matters, program rigidity, lack of coordination among the agencies responsible for providing youth recreational services, and a general lack of regard for young people's needs and wants. The lack of precision concerning the division of responsibilities of the various levels of government seems to worsen the situation.

The CCSD, in collaboration with the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association conducted a survey of municipal recreation providers in 2000, to examine children's access to recreation. Included were questions about user fees and how they affect participation. The most cited barrier to participation was transportation. Children unable to access transportation to and from recreational facilities could not participate in the programs. Lack of bus service or inadequate bus service can affect children living in urban and rural areas.

Most municipal recreation programs for children in Canada charge user fees with over 90 per cent of aquatic programs for children and over 75 per cent of children's athletic programs charging users. After school programs and drop in programs for youth are the programs least likely to charge user fees. User fees for most aquatic and athletic programs have risen over the last five years and in some cases were implemented for the first time within the last five years. More than half of the respondents said they felt that user fees were a moderate barrier to participation, while between 13 and 20 per cent felt that user fees were a significant barrier.

Social and cultural barriers are thought to be significant as children from different ethnic groups may not be familiar with some of the activities being offered and may not feel comfortable in participating. Finally, the *Access to Recreation Programs in Canada* report also found that limited facilities, high equipment costs, and lack of volunteers were significant barriers to participation.

Impacts of Recreation – Positive and Negative

Present Impacts

Immediate Physical Outcomes: The immediate impacts of recreational activity on youth physical and biological development are numerous. However, the literature in the health sciences, which is the primary source of information on youth physical and biological development, does not differentiate between structured and non-structured activities, so we cannot distinguish between the physical outcomes related to structured and non-structured recreation within the literature review.

Physical activity has an important impact on the growth and maturation of youth. It has been found that physical activity generates greater skeletal mineralization, greater bone density and increased bone mass and flexibility. Physical activity is an important factor in the regulation of body mass. There is also a positive correlation between physical activity, increased muscle strength, motor fitness and aerobic capacity. Regular physical activity reduces the risk of coronary disease for at-risk youth. But health problems such as unintentional injuries can arise during sporting activities. Delays in maturation and menstrual dysfunction can also be produced by physical activity practices that are too intense.

The data analysis showed the following. Parents of children who participated in organized sports rated their children's health as slightly better than parents of children who did not participate in organized sports. Sixty-three per cent of children who participated in organized sports were reported to be in excellent health by their parents, compared to 57.9 per cent of non-participants. Participation in other forms of recreation did not appear to be related to health status. Children who participated in any of the sampled forms of recreation (coached sports, dance/gymnastics, art/drama/music, guides/scouts, day camp or overnight camp) were somewhat less likely than non-participants in these activities to have ever tried smoking, which can be considered an indicator of high risk behaviour.

Immediate Psychosocial Outcomes: For the psychosocial impact of *structured recreation*, the literature reports a positive correlation between physical activity, structured outdoor programs and extra-curricular activities, which increased self-esteem, self-concept, acceptance among peers, and self-empowerment. Physical activity can also have an impact on the development of cognitive functions. It has been found that participation in structured recreation is less likely than non-participation to be associated with deviant behaviour, and a negative relationship was demonstrated between participation in extra-curricular activities and dropping out school. We have also seen that structured recreation decreases boredom, a factor linked to the development of deviant and unhealthy behaviour. This is perhaps an explanation for the link between participation in recreation and lower rates of delinquency. But highly competitive sports activities or vigorous training programs can also produce negative psychosocial effects such burnout and high stress levels. In some cases, physical activity may be associated with a distorted body image and an unrealistic desire to lose weight.

For *non-structured recreation* and its impact on psychosocial development, the literature reports a positive correlation between physical activity and increased self-esteem, self-concept, acceptance among peers, and self-empowerment. A positive correlation was also found between participation in unsupervised sports and in artistic activities and a reduced rate of psychosocial problems among children and youth. But, as with structured recreation, physical activity may be associated with a distorted body image and an unrealistic desire to lose weight among young girls.

An analysis of the quantitative data showed the following. The vast majority of all children report being happy with their lives. However, the proportion reporting so was slightly higher for children who participated in organized sports. Children who participated in guides/scouts were more likely to be doing well or very well overall, compared to children who did not participate in guides/scouts.

Youth participation in organized sports is also linked to higher levels of self-esteem. Youth who participated in organized sports were somewhat more likely to report being very satisfied with their level of self-esteem (46.5 per cent) compared to 37.0 per cent of non-participating youth.

Children who participated in organized sports and children who did not participate were equally likely to report that they engaged in bullying. However, slightly higher proportions of children who did not participate in organized sports or in art/drama/music reported being victims of bullying behaviour. Children who never participated in guides or scouts and children who never attended camp were slightly more likely to engage in bullying behaviour, and children who attended guides or scouts were slightly more likely to be the victims of bullying behaviour.

Children between the ages of 10 and 13 who participated in one or more of the specified recreational activities (coached sports, dance/gymnastics, art/drama/music, guides/scouts or day or overnight camp) were much more likely to report that they expected to complete university or college, in response to the question "How far do you expect to go in school?". While 71.9 per cent of children who participated in coached sports one or more times per week expected to complete college/university, only 59.7 per cent of non–participants expected to do so. Seventy-one per cent of participants in dance/gymnastics, one or more times per week, expected to complete college or university, compared to 67 per cent of non-participants.

With the exception of camp participation, children who participated in structured recreational activities (coached sports, gymnastics/dance, art/drama/music, guides/scouts) were more likely to report getting along very well with their friends and having more close friends and spending more time with close friends. Ninety per cent of children involved in coached sports reported having lots of friends and 83.8 per cent reported getting along easily with others compared to 87.1 per cent of non-participants reporting they have many close friends and 79.9 per cent getting along easily with others. Participation in recreational activities does not appear to be related to how well children get along with their parents, although children who did not participate in recreational activities were slightly more likely to report having better relationships with their siblings.

Immediate Civic Outcomes: The literature does identify some civic outcomes associated with *structured recreation*. High-risk youth can benefit from the positive effects derived from structured activities (such martial arts) if the activity includes a cognitive and social component. It has been found that participation in structured recreation has been seen as beneficial to moral development to the extent that behaviour, attitudes and decisions all draw attention to moral considerations. But some authors argue that *non-structured recreation* is more likely to give rise to moral behaviour, inasmuch as the child is directly involved in decision-making.

The analysis of the available data showed the following. Data from the NLSCY indicates a strong relationship between participation in organized recreational activities and propensity to participate in unpaid school activities, fund raising and community work. Forty-two percent of children who participated frequently in dance/gymnastics also helped with school activities, compared to 32.1 per cent of children who did not participate. Children who participated in art/drama/music were also more likely to help with fundraising (53.9 per cent) than children who did not participate (41.8 per cent).

Childhood participation in team sports and youth groups appears to have an impact on adult participation in the community and volunteering activity. The NSGVP found that adults who participated in organized sports and youth groups as children were much more likely to have also performed volunteer work and to have participated in student government as children than those that did not participate. Over 70 per cent of respondents who had belonged to a youth group as children had also performed volunteer work, compared to only 33.3 per cent of respondents who did not belong to a youth group. Sixty percent of respondents who had participated in organized sports had also done some volunteer work versus 33.1 per cent who did not participate in organized sports. Participation in a youth group had a greater impact on volunteering than did participation in team sports.

Youth patterns of participation in recreation and volunteer activities are somewhat different than that for younger children. The GSS 1998 found that youth aged 15 to 17 who participated in organized sports and youth who did not participate were equally likely to have spent time volunteering. However, the types of volunteering activities that organized sports participants and non-participants engage in differ slightly. Youth who did not participate in organized sports were slightly more likely to have volunteered through a group or organization and to have helped repair or build a facility for an organization. Youth who participated in organized sports were slightly more likely to have taught or coached as an unpaid volunteer, or to have collected, served or delivered food for an organization. Both groups were equally likely to have canvassed, campaigned, or fundraised as an unpaid volunteer; to have provided counseling as a volunteer through an organization; or to have helped to organize activities or events for an organization.

Future Impacts

Future Physical Outcomes: Again, the health sciences literature does not differentiate between structured and non-structured activities, so from the literature review we cannot distinguish between future physical outcomes related to structured and non-structured recreation. Nonetheless, participation in physical activity has been found to produce some future impacts on youth physical outcomes.

Physical activity among youth suffering from obesity can play an important role in lowering the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases during adulthood and limiting the risk of developing hypertension in the future. The impact of physical activity on the cardiovascular health of children considered to be at risk can be reversible, and the risk may not persist in the future unless the physical activity is curtailed in adulthood.

Future Psychosocial Outcomes: Some authors speculate that psychosocial outcomes developed in younger children will persist over the life-course. However, we have not found any research that conclusively links recreational activity in youth – structured or non-structured – to future psychosocial outcomes.

Future Civic Outcomes: Relating to future civic competencies, the literature reports a positive correlation between participation in extracurricular activities and political involvement in adulthood, and between involvement in youth and religious organizations and community involvement in adulthood.

The data analyzed showed the following. Compared to adults who did not participate in team sports or youth groups as children, adults who participated in team sports or youth groups as children were much more likely (as adults) to canvass, campaign, or fundraise as an unpaid volunteer; to be a member of a board or a committee; to teach or coach for an organization as an unpaid volunteer; and to have voted in the last federal election. For example, 13.2 per cent of respondents who had participated in a youth group as a child, were unpaid members of a board or committee as adults, compared to only 6.2 per cent of respondents who had not belonged to a youth group. There was little difference between childhood participation and non-participation in team sports and adult membership in a neighbourhood or community association or membership in a political party. However, adults who had participated in youth groups as children were slightly more likely to have membership in a neighbourhood or community association or membership in a political party.

Research and Policy Implications Relating to the Four Hypothesis

To recap, the four major hypotheses set out by the Laidlaw Foundation concerning the policy significance of youth recreation are the *Human Development Hypothesis*, the *Civic Competence Hypothesis*, the *Insufficiency Hypothesis*, and the *Inadequacy Hypothesis*.

It is almost impossible, due to the way the literature is structured, to directly address the hypotheses, which were framed by the Laidlaw Foundation in the negative, that is, in terms of the *absence* of participation in structured recreation. This is for two reasons. First, looking only at the absence of participation leaves too many unanswered questions about the effects of participation. Second, and more important, the literature quite exclusively analyses participation in the positive. Therefore, we do not know the impact of non-participation on human development – physical or psychosocial – except, in part, for biological development. Neither can we assess the effects of non-participation on the development of civic competencies.

Moreover, the hypotheses are framed in the long term, saying that non-participation affects *future* civic development or long-run socio-emotional human development. Because of the serious lack of longitudinal studies, we cannot draw evidence-based conclusions about the long-term effects of *participation* on youth socio-emotional or civic development. Nor do we know if constraints limiting youth participation have effects that persist throughout the life course. We can say even less about the long-term impacts of *non-participation* and can neither support nor refute the hypothesis that insufficient participation will ultimately affect the quality of democracy. Therefore, *further research on the collective and social consequences of youth participation in recreation could be a way to analyze patterns, so as to determine if access to recreation should be treated as a public good.*

Many of the deficiencies in the research stem from the nature of psychosocial development itself. It is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by many factors. Therefore, recreation is likely to have an essentially *indirect* impact on it. Except for physical and biological development, there are many *causal* variables but only positive and negative *correlations* between participation in some kinds of activities and youth development.

Also, the current literature does not provide us with information about the *level* of activity required to obtain positive outcomes for either human development or the development of civic competencies.

Relating to the ***Human Development Hypothesis***, adolescence constitutes a critical period in the development of identity formation and self-concept. However, there are very few studies that describe the way that recreation can influence this process. We have seen that structured recreation can foster positive lifestyle choices among youth and, in some cases, can help reduce delinquency and dropping out of school. Some researchers argue that it is less expensive to set up recreation programs than it is to pay the eventual social costs of not setting them up. Therefore, *future research needs to delve more deeply into the circumstances that influence the development of positive attitudes and identity formation among youth.*

Instead of looking for *moral development* through structured recreation, the literature told us that we should look at activities, circumstances and environments that *encourage* moral development. We should be able to say that certain activities such the scout and guide movements and structured outdoor programs are more likely to promote moral development or civic competencies, but this has not been a focus of Canadian researchers. Adult attitudes (i.e., coaches and parents) have also been found to play a significant role in the way that youth acquire moral skills through recreation. *The role of adults as well as types of activities fostering and encouraging moral development therefore need to be further explored.*

The importance of diversity in structured recreation for helping to develop different kinds of skills (social, emotional, civic or moral skills) has not been analyzed in the literature. Neither has the balance between the level of structured and unstructured recreation that is needed to obtain certain skills. In general, we can say that, in Canada, not much attention has been paid to recreation at all, despite the fact that it may turn out to be a critically important means of acquiring socio-emotional and civic skills. This absence of information does not permit us to draw any definitive conclusions about the ***Civic Competence Hypothesis***.

The effect of diversity in structured recreation for helping to develop different kinds of skills (social, emotional, civic or moral skills) has not been analyzed in the literature. Neither has the balance between the level of structured and unstructured recreation that is needed to obtain certain skills. These both require research attention.

Relating to the ***Insufficiency Hypothesis***, we have seen that significant number of youth face multiple barriers to participation, among them youth from poor economic backgrounds, young girls, and young people from minority groups. All the studies agree that the needs of youth living in poverty do not receive the same attention by public services as those of other young people, but few studies identify the specific recreational needs of young people from disadvantaged environments. Even fewer suggest how public services can help these youth without stigmatizing them.

Aware of the complexity and multidimensional nature of poverty, a range of authors maintain that holistic, integrated strategies are needed to produce greater participation by children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Municipal recreation user fees discourage participation by youth from low-income families and, in some provinces, user fees are widespread and, in certain cases, have increased. A re-examination of user fee policies and other cost factors could be part of the answer to equalizing access to structured recreation.

We have also seen that gender is still a major correlate of differences in participation in structured recreation. The persistence of sexual stereotypes should be taken into account when designing programs. If we see equal access to recreation as a social goal, the development of promotional strategies for recreational activities for youth from both sexes should be part of the political agenda.

As well, we have seen that the Canadian literature on public services analyzes *access* to services, but not the *supply* of recreational services as such. This undoubtedly explains why the negative assessment of public services focuses on lack of access, but only to existing supply. We found that the presence of good parks, playgrounds and play spaces in the neighbourhood was an important factor in rates of participation. We do not know, however, what impact access to publicly supported recreation services has on rates of participation in structured recreation, or on differential socioeconomic rates of participation. It is a prerequisite to knowing the implications of the ***Inadequacy Hypothesis***, which attributes the non-participation of youth to the inadequacy of existing public systems in dealing with the provision of youth recreation. Therefore, *more research on recreational supply is required to have a better idea of the structured recreation that is available to youth.*

Limits emerging from the service delivery process challenge governmental practices in it. Organizational constraints seem numerous. There is not a clear mandate to promote equality of opportunity in recreation, and the lack of precision in the division of responsibilities of the various levels of governments makes the situation even worse.

Authors call for greater flexibility in administering and developing recreational programs; enhanced accessibility to programs in terms of costs, transportation and availability; and, above all, greater awareness of the needs and desires of youth. Also, changing lifestyles and the increased popularity of non-structured recreation raises questions about the ability of current recreational structures to meet youth's changing recreational needs, and about the impact of this new situation on young people's participation in structured recreation.

Overall, the findings of the literature review permit the following research gaps and recommendations to be identified:

- There is a lack of systematic research on the effects of *structured recreation* on children and adolescents. Most studies simply do not take the distinction between structured and unstructured recreation into account. This holds true especially for the health sciences literature.

Recommendation: Research comparing the potentially different effects of structured and unstructured recreation would help to fill this gap. Such distinctions are important because of competing hypotheses. A "social capital" hypothesis, for example, would make no distinction between structured and unstructured recreation, because in that literature it is the *interaction* that matters. Hypotheses about the effects of peers and interaction with adults, in contrast, would see the distinction between structured and unstructured recreation as relevant.

- Studies on physical activities and sports dominate the literature on youth and structured recreation. There are few Canadian studies of other kinds of structured recreation such as artistic endeavors, hobbies and clubs, or of movements such as Scouts, Guides, and Boys and Girls Clubs, although many of these activities specifically emphasize the development of social skills and civic competencies. While the lack of studies is proving to be less critical with respect to extracurricular and outdoor activities, it is very important in the case of artistic activities.

  Recommendation: Research on non-sport recreation, and comparisons of sports with other forms of recreation would make a significant contribution to knowledge. Evidence-based information about the contributions of all kinds of recreation is important in these times of limited budgets. Such information is all key to thinking about the kinds of partnerships that could be forged with the voluntary sector in order to advance an agenda of inclusion and citizenship.

- There is a lack of longitudinal data on youth and structured recreation. We do not know the long-term effects of recreation on youth development, nor do we know if constraints limiting youth participation have effects that persist throughout life. Researchers agree that there is a general need for longitudinal studies on youth participation in structured recreation.

  Recommendation: Research on the cross-time effects of recreation is key to understanding and making policy conclusions in this area. While it is true that longitudinal studies are expensive and require time, it is possible to collect more detailed information from adults about their recreational activities as young people in order to begin mapping this area. Such evidence is obviously important if civic competencies and social capital are to become the focus of attention.

- Studies of "youth and recreation" generally focus on individual outcomes and much less on the collective consequences of youth participation in recreation. Analysis of the economic costs of physical inactivity is almost the only exception. Focusing only on the individual outcomes of recreation gives rise to a knowledge gap in research on recreation as a public good, as a citizen right, and as a way to foster social cohesion and healthy democracy. Perceiving recreation as an essentially individual activity is undoubtedly one of the reasons that there are few studies on the supply of public recreational services as a factor influencing participation levels.

Recommendation: It is important to re-conceptualize recreation as a collective good. This involves a certain amount of theoretical work, building on the very limited Canadian studies but the more prevalent European studies that analyze recreation in these ways. It also involves careful empirical work to bridge levels of analysis, from micro to macro. Successful work of this type would constitute a major contribution to recasting the public agenda around recreation.

Research Gaps and Recommendations from the Data Review

Unfortunately, data from the child response questionnaire for the 1998 NLSCY were not available when we undertook this research. These data, which will soon be available, will cover children aged 13 to 15, making possible a more detailed analysis of how participation changes with increasing age. Further, the three cycles of NLSCY for children who are now (1998) 13 to 15 years of age will permit us to see continuing involvement in structured recreation over time is associated with stronger evidence of positive (or negative) outcomes than we could determine using only the cross-sectional data for 1996. Further analysis could be undertaken of the extent to which participation in one structured activity (e.g., sports) is associated with participation in others (e.g., dance/drama) and the extent to which involvement continues and deepens among participants.

New NSGVP survey data will be available in August 2001 permitting replication/confirmation of the findings reported here. The major data gap is on infrastructure cost barriers to participation. We have very little data on what share of youth recreation is provided by the private, not for profit and public sector, and cost and quality differences by type of provider. This gap may be remedied in part by attempts to further administrative data. (The federation of Canadian Municipalities is actively interested in this subject.) The CCSD is currently undertaking some key informant interviews with and for the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association relating to best practices in terms of reducing barriers to participation in recreation on the part of low-income children.

CPRN Discussion Paper

Literature Review on Learning through Recreation

Prepared for the Laidlaw Foundation

by

Caroline Beauvais

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CPRN RCRPP

Canadian Policy Research Networks
250 Albert Street, Suite 600
Ottawa, ON K1P 6M1
http://www.cprn.org

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. (CPRN)
600 – 250 Albert Street Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6M1
Tel: (613) 567-7500 Fax: (613) 567-7640
Web Site: http://www.cprn.org

Literature Review on Learning through Recreation

Prepared for the Laidlaw Foundation

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Caroline Beauvais

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The Genesis of this Research

In December 2000, the Laidlaw Foundation commissioned the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) and the Family Network of Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) to conduct a joint research project on recreation for young people. The research produced two detailed reports on different aspects of the subject:

- A *Data Analysis: Learning through Recreation* was prepared by Andrew Jackson, Paul Roberts and Shelley Harman of the Canadian Council on Social Development, and
- A *Literature Review on Learning through Recreation* was prepared by Caroline Beauvais of the Family Network of Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Based on these two reports, CCSD and CPRN prepared a Joint Summary Report of the findings, available as a Working Paper from the Laidlaw Foundation. The summary report is entitled *Four Hypotheses about the Public Policy Significance of Youth Recreation: Lessons from a Literature Review and a Data Analysis on "Learning Through Recreation."*

Literature Review on Learning through Recreation

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Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. (CPRN)
600 – 250 Albert Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6M1
Tel: (613) 567-7500 Fax: (613) 567-7640
Web Site: http://www.cprn.org

Literature Review on Learning through Recreation

By Caroline Beauvais

There is virtually unanimous agreement on the importance of recreation in developing the physical, psychological and social abilities of children and youth. The trust placed in recreation as a factor affecting personal development is often based on personal experience. Everyone can refer to their own experiences to appreciate the effects of recreation on their own well-being. But beyond first impressions and vague intuitions, there is a scientific literature that for several decades has been substantiating the crucial role played by recreation in the development of children and youth, which has expanded continuously and brought some conceptual clarification to this field of knowledge.

Some health and social science studies focus on the contribution of recreation to fostering the biological development and moral, social and civic activities of youth. Other studies start from the assumption that recreation has a beneficial effect on youth, and then identify the social, economic, political and cultural factors that inhibit access to and participation in recreational activities by young people. Our literature review will be based on these two approaches to the relationship between youth and recreational activity. It will first examine the effects of recreation on the physical and psychosocial development of youth, and then review the factors affecting participation by young people in recreation activities. To begin, we will define the scope of the literature covered and demarcate the boundaries of our research.

Structuring the Literature Review – Scope and Focus

This literature review will summarize what we know about the access of young people between 10 and 15 years of age to structured recreational activities, and the effects of these activities. Fitness Canada defines recreation as comprising all socially acceptable activities in which a person may choose to take part that will make his or her leisure time more interesting, more enjoyable, and personally satisfying (McKay, *et al.*, 1996: 284). There are many forms of recreation – reading, playing sports, engaging in artistic pursuits, hanging out, camping, making music in a group, surfing the Web, and so on. We view *structured recreation* as a significantly smaller subset of recreation, which consists of recreational activities involving elements of instruction, choice and skill development.[1]

[1] This is the definition found in the Laidlaw Foundation document entitled *Learning through Recreation* (2000).

Structured recreation is this kind of recreation that will be considered in this literature review. Our definition sets aside individual or family-based forms of recreation, as well as forms of recreation which are interpersonal but do not involve instruction or skill development.[2] The reason for delimiting our interest in this way is that our first goal is to identify the impact of *organized recreational activities outside the home* on the transition from youth to adulthood. Our second goal is to analyze the broad social consequences of choices made by public authorities about the distribution of recreational resources, about who has access to them, at what cost and in what circumstances.

This literature review is primarily an overview rather than an exhaustive inventory of the literature. We are endeavouring to organize the literature around specific issues characteristic of the way young people relate to recreation. We have given priority to Canadian literature, bearing in mind that the handful of existing literature reviews on this topic do not take into account the national origins of the studies' authors. Sifting out the Canadian literature from the copious American literature seemed a useful exercise; however, this is not common practice. We decided to introduce foreign studies wherever it appeared that they would contribute to a particular topic, or wherever relevant Canadian literature was sparse or even silent on the topic. Thus, the foreign literature sheds light on the gaps in the Canadian literature, and suggests new avenues to be explored within the framework of future research in Canada. Noting gaps in the literature is just as important as itemizing what is already available on the topic. Therefore, we will conclude each section by enumerating the gaps in knowledge so as to guide future research in the area of youth and recreation.

We have decided to examine only the scientific literature, that is to say, the literature originating within research institutes or universities. Some reports published by governments or by private or public organizations will also be taken into account when they are scientific in character or when, as a result of their impact on new programs or new orientations, they have left their imprint on the field. We will also give priority to recent studies (from 1990 on). At the same time, however, we note less recent studies that are still considered important. Unless a historical review is necessary for an understanding of the issue at hand, we have neither employed an historical approach nor documented the evolution of the issue.

To do this literature review, we used several sources to find the documents that could be of some relevance. First, we identified literature reviews and any reference documents that already exist on the subject of recreation, leisure or physical activity. Books such the *Conclusions of The 1992 International Consensus Symposium on Physical Activity, Fitness, and Health* (Bouchard, Shepard and Stephens, 1994), *Sport in Society* (Coakley, 2001), *Benefits of Leisure* (Driver, Brown and Peterson, 1991), *Benefits and Impact of Physical Activity for Ontario* (Craig, Russell and Cameron, 1995), *Overcoming Systemic Barriers to Access in Active Living* (Donnelly and Harvey, 1996) were useful for assessing the existing state of knowledge.

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[2] *Learning through Recreation* also mentions *interpersonal recreation*, defined as activities involving pleasure-related choices and interpersonal interactions. We believe that this definition encompasses too broad a range of activities to be assessed in this review.

Interviews were also conducted with two experts in the field: Robin Wright, Assistant Professor at The School of Social Work, McGill University; and Jean Harvey, Professor, School of Human Kinetics at Ottawa University. These experts directed us to more detailed research findings. We used also databanks such as *Sport Discuss* and many others in the social sciences to find relevant articles and scientific reviews. The goal was a synthetic literature review of published academic studies of youth and structured recreation that would help the Laidlaw Foundation identify research gaps and research needs for the future in Canada. Therefore, we have put the emphasis on documents and articles that reflect the current field of knowledge in Canada, without claiming this is an exhaustive review of the subject.

We will now take a closer look at the relationship between youth and recreation.

The Two Dimensions of the Relationship between Youth and Recreation

The Laidlaw Foundation (1999) identified four major hypotheses concerning the policy significance of youth recreation. They are:

1. ***The Human Development Hypothesis*:** The absence of structured recreation for youth negatively affects the long run socio-emotional human development of youth as adults.

2. ***The Civic Competence Hypothesis*:** The absence of involvement by youth in interpersonal recreation activities affects an individual's future civic competence and also affects the quality of democracy.

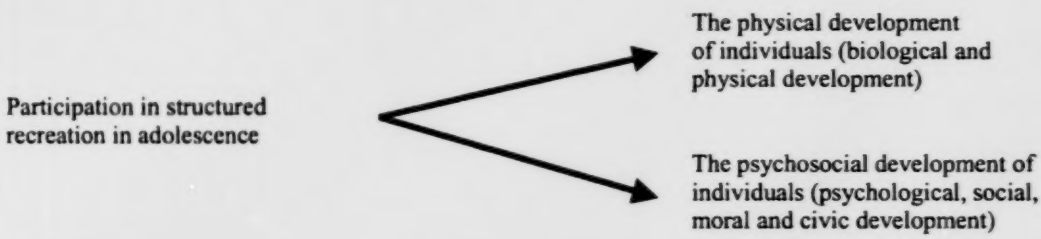
3. ***The Insufficiency Hypothesis*:** Significant numbers of youth are not participating in recreation activities at levels sufficient to support their human development and future civic competence.

4. ***The Inadequacy Hypothesis*:** Non-participation by youth in recreation and arts activities can be related to the inadequacy of existing public systems dealing with the provision of youth recreation.

We think that these hypotheses can be conceived as two aspects of the relationship between youth and recreation. The first dimension of this relationship is the impact of recreation on the biological, social, emotional and civic development of youth. The second dimension of the relationship consists of social, economic, cultural and political factors that are barriers to participation by youth. The first aspect of the relationship responds to the *Human Development Hypothesis* (#1), the *Civic Competence Hypothesis* (#2), and the *Insufficiency Hypothesis* (#3) identified in *Learning in Recreation* (Laidlaw, 1999). The second corresponds to a part of the *Civic Competence Hypothesis* (#2), but primarily assesses the *Inadequacy Hypothesis* (#4).

Laidlaw's hypotheses are framed in the negative, only considering the *absence* of participation in structured recreation. However, the literature review considers relationships between outcomes and *both* non-participation *and* participation. Looking only at *absence* would leave too many unanswered questions.

Figure 1
Possible Relationships between Recreation and Outcomes

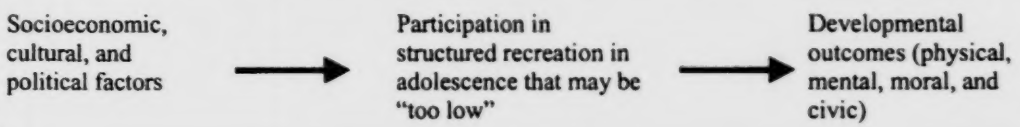

Participation in structured recreation in adolescence
The physical development of individuals (biological and physical development)
The psychosocial development of individuals (psychological, social, moral and civic development)

As we said, the first dimension of this relationship is the impact of recreation on the biological, social, emotional and civic development of youth. The central issue here is whether participation in structured recreation during adolescence affects the physical and psychosocial development of individuals. Our literature review canvasses the published literature for research studies confirming or invalidating the two relationships set out graphically in Figure 1. The arrows indicate our expectation of a possible correlation between the two factors, although not necessarily a causal relationship.

We will also attempt to establish the level of participation required to obtain specific results. In this literature, we distinguish short-term from long-term impacts to find out the following: (1) if the two types of impacts show similarities; (2) if some impacts emerge only over the long term; and (3) if certain impacts quickly fade following participation in an activity.

The second dimension of the relationship between youth and recreation consists of social, economic, cultural and political factors that are barriers to participation by youth. A number of correlates of the patterns of participation generate (at least in some parts of the adolescent population) a level of participation that is too low to produce positive outcomes in either physical or psychosocial development. The possible structure of the relationship can be represented graphically, as in Figure 2.

Figure 2
The Possible Structure of the Relationship Involving Circumstances of Youth Participation and Outcomes


Socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors
Participation in structured recreation in adolescence that may be "too low"
Developmental outcomes (physical, mental, moral, and civic)

Therefore, the literature review will examine all studies that establish the minimum levels of participation necessary to generate positive outcomes, and that report on the social correlates of rates of participation (or vice versa). We will examine the barriers to recreation identified in the literature and their impact on youth participation rates in structured recreational activities. If literature exists on the topic, we will attempt to establish if low participation affects the development of youth.

The literature review is organized around the two dimensions of the relationship between youth and recreation, as noted above. Each dimension is discussed in a separate section. Each part begins by introducing and summarizing the field of study and ends by identifying the inadequacies of the literature in the field.

1.0 The Impact of Participation in Structured Recreation on the Physical and Psychosocial Skills of Youth

Participation by youth in structured recreation may have multiple effects on their development. While, these may categorized in several ways, we divide them into two major categories: those having an impact on the physical and biological development of youth, and those affecting their psychosocial development. We begin by examining studies dealing with the effects of recreation on the physical and biological development of youth.

1.1 The Impact of Structured Recreation on Physical and Biological Development

The literature dealing with the impact of structured recreation on biological development and on the acquisition of physical skills by youth aged 10 to 15 is principally oriented toward the study of physical activities and sports. While this stands to reason, it nevertheless reveals the inadequacy of data on the impact of other types of activities (that it, activities other than sports or those that are not principally directed toward physical activity) on the biological and physical development of youth.

Studies in the health sciences are often treated as "basic source materials." Sport sociologists[3] and researchers associated with various social science disciplines have employed these materials to build up a knowledge base. In this regard, the conclusions of the 1992 International Consensus Symposium on Physical Activity, Fitness, and Health,[4] now published in a single volume, provide a good starting point for studying the empirical impacts of physical activity on the physical development of youth[5].

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[3] Jay Coakley notes the variety of identities adopted by researchers in the sociology of sport. Some authors who treat sport as a social and cultural phenomenon identify themselves as sociologists, whereas other authors see themselves as sports sociologists, scientific experts or consultants (Coakley, 2001, 18).

[4] This Symposium was held in Toronto from May 5-9, 1992 (Bouchard, Shepard and Stephens, 1994).

[5] Craig, Russell and Cameron (1995) have also conducted an exhaustive examination of the benefits associated with physical activity. However, as Donnelly and Harvey note, their literature review focuses only on studies that identified the *positive* benefits associated with physical activity, and thus in large measure ignores studies whose conclusions did not support their findings (Donnelly and Harvey, 1996: 5). For the United States, the work by Driver, Brown and Peterson (1991) is very useful in understanding the benefits of recreational activities in general.

The document provides a comprehensive analysis of the effects of physical activity on 21 body systems and tissues, and on 24 diseases and conditions (Bouchard, Shepard and Stephens, 1994).

The goal in this paper, however, is not simply to identify the sources that highlight the physical and biological benefits of recreation on the development of youth. More precisely, it is to identify the benefits associated with *structured* activity. However, the literature in the health sciences attaches little importance to the difference between structured and non-structured activities, with sport and exercise frequently included under the more general concept of physical activity.[6]

Repucci (cited in Offord, Hanna, Hoult, 1992, 10) deplores the lack of systematic research in the United States on the effects of organized sports on children and adolescents. There is a similar lack of research on this subject in Canada. It is usually sport sociologists who distinguish structured recreational activities and non-structured recreational activities. They do so, among other reasons, to determine which of the two promotes a higher level of physical activity. For example, Kino-Québec holds that structured activities promote regular, even more intense, physical activity among youth because, among other reasons, it is supervised (Kino-Québec, 1998: 10). On the other hand, Coakley in the United States maintains that non-structured and informal activities initiated by youth are primarily action-centred, while activities organized and supervised by adults are primarily rule-centred, and thus involve a lower level of physical activity (Coakley, 2001: 118).[7]

The health sciences literature is the primary source of information on youth physical and biological development. As previously noted, this literature rarely makes the distinction between structured and non-structured recreation. The emphasis is simply on physical activity of any type, and its impacts.

Given that health sciences studies often make no distinction between structured and non-structured activities, we will use the literature as is, distinguishing between physical benefits and structured activities whenever there is literature available to enable this kind of distinction.

The 1992 International Consensus Symposium on Physical Activity, Fitness, and Health notes the importance of physical activity on the growth and maturation of youth (Bouchard, Shepard and Stephens, 1994: 62). The authors agree that regular physical activity is an important factor in the regulation of body mass. The fat found in the body mass of inactive adolescents is 1 to 4 percentage points higher than that found in the body mass of active adolescents (Bar-Or, 1994; Stephens and Craig, 1990).

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[6] For example, to facilitate an understanding of research in the field of health, most works emphasize the importance of distinguishing among the concepts of physical activity, exercise and sport. Sport is differentiated from physical activity and exercise (which is a regular physical activity directed toward attaining specific objectives) by the element of competition present, at least in its North American formulation. Other ongoing discussions involve various components of the idea of fitness. See Bouchard and Shepard (1994: 77) and Driver, Brown and Peterson (1991).

[7] Offord, Hanna and Hoult also note the divergent opinions on the benefits of sports targeting youth. Arguments supporting a positive view of such sports note that children may become more cooperative, increase their self-esteem and develop leadership abilities, while detractors claim that sports place too great an emphasis on competition, with its physical and psychological demands (1992: 10).

Regular physical exertion also generates greater skeletal mineralization, greater bone density and increased bone mass and flexibility (Bouchard, Shepard and Stephens, 1994: 62)[8]. There also seems to be a correlation between physical activity on one hand and increased muscle strength, motor fitness and aerobic capacity on the other hand (Craig, Russell and Cameron, 1995: 98). Aerobic capacity improves after the age of 10, and especially during adolescence.

A decline in the risk of coronary heart disease has also been observed among children who have followed an appropriate physical training program. The results were especially significant in the case of obese children (Craig, Russell and Cameron, 1995, Kino-Québec, 2000, Després, Bouchard, Malina, 1990).

Studies analyzing the potential physical benefits of physical activity target overweight youth in particular. This is largely due to the increase in recent years in the number of obese Canadian children and youth (Tremblay and Willms, 2000). The trend toward obesity introduces numerous risks for youth, and for public health generally. Studies show that obesity among children and youth is highly likely to continue in adult life and that many health problems, including hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and premature death, are over-represented among overweight persons and those suffering from obesity (Tremblay and Willms, 2000).

Fortunately, some studies show that physical activity among youth suffering from obesity can play an important role in lowering the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases during adulthood and can reduce their arterial blood pressure, thereby limiting the risk that they will develop hypertension in adulthood (Després, Bouchard and Malina, 1990: 243; Kino-Québec, 2000: 17). Després, Bouchard and Malina concede that, for the time being, the studies lead them to believe that the impact of physical activity on the cardiovascular health of children considered to be at risk is reversible, and that the risk will not persist into the future unless the physical activity is curtailed in adulthood (Després, Bouchard and Malina, 1990: 243).

Most of these studies seek to determine whether improvements that result from participation by youth in physical activity extend into adulthood or, stated differently, whether the benefits of physical activity are transposable to the future. There is little empirical data on this subject and existing studies are inconclusive (Butcher, 1996). The 1992 International Consensus Symposium on Physical Activity, Fitness, and Health notes that although physical activity is routinely viewed as having a positive influence on growth and biological ageing, the "interage correlations (tracking) of fitness indicators from childhood through late adolescence are generally moderate to low, and have limited predictive utility. Tracking of fitness from adolescence to adulthood is only also moderate" (Bouchard, Shepard and Stephens, 1994: 62).[9]

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[8] For similar results, see Kino-Québec (2000); Driver, Brown and Peterson (1991); and Craig, Russell and Cameron (1995).

[9] Similarly, Oded Bar-Or concludes a literature review dealing with the impact of childhood and adolescent physical fitness and activity on the risk profile of adults by noting that there "are no prospective data up to this time that support or reject the hypothesis that childhood physical activity *per se* affects the risk for chronic disease in adulthood" (Bar-Or, 1994: 936).

The same holds true in studies attempting to demonstrate the influence of physical activity during youth as a predictor for physical activity in adulthood. Butcher cites two American studies that attempted to determine if participation in sports in secondary school was a predictor of involvement in sport during adulthood. The first study notes a significant relationship for girls only, and the second study concludes that involvement in sports at the secondary school level was not a positive determinant of adult physical activity (1996, 278).

After conducting a literature review on the subject in Canada, Offord, Hanna and Hoult conclude that "the correlation between childhood and adult levels of physical activity is weak or non-existent, and it is not possible to predict accurately in childhood which group will comprise the inactive population in young adulthood" (1992: 2).[10] Nonetheless, the secondary analysis of a national survey of Canadian adults undertaken by Curtis, McTeer and White arrives at the opposite conclusion: "High school involvement in sport, for inter-school sport activities, is a comparatively strong predictor of adult sport involvement" (1999: 348).[11]

Another issue causing problems for researchers is determining the level of activity required by youth to obtain health benefits and improve their physical condition. Following a long period during which it was believed that the health benefits deriving from physical activity were obtained through vigorous activity alone, most authors now agree that these benefits may be achieved through less intense activity (Butcher, 1996, 277, Health Canada, 1998). This new approach promotes physical activity among sedentary persons, emphasizing the fact that a little activity goes a long way.

It appears that the required levels of activity vary, not only by expected outcomes, but also from individual to individual, each of whom reacts differently to physical activity. While general indicators of the activity level needed to stay healthy are available, they do not always differentiate among age groups.[12] However, Kino-Québec notes that we do not know the exact amount of physical activity needed to promote bone growth, body-height and the maturation of children and youth (Bar-Or and Malina, 1995).

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[10] The authors nevertheless emphasize that intervention around the seventh or eighth is important since this is a time when many young people, especially girls, abandon physical activity, or reduce it to dangerously low levels. Similarly, the authors emphasize the importance of studying the factors that lead youth to withdraw from such activity (Offord, Hanna and Hoult, 1992: 2). McKay, Reid, Tremblay and Pelletier arrive at a similar diagnosis, and note that there is a need to conduct longitudinal and cross-sectional studies with direct comparisons between youth and adult behaviours (1996:289).

[11] A previous study undertaken by White and Curtis also concluded on a positive note (Curtis, McTeer and White, 1999: 351).

[12] Canada's *Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Living* recommends 60 minutes of physical activity every day to stay healthy. As people progress to moderately difficult activities, they can cut down to 30 minutes, four days a week. Time spent on activities varies with the amount of effort expended, and ranges from 60 minutes for light activity, to 30 minutes for moderate activity, to 20 minutes for vigorous activity. As well, those following this guide may choose to divide their daily physical activity into sessions of 10 consecutive minutes (Health Canada, 1998: 4). The guidelines employed by Kino-Québec are linked to expenditure of calories or energy (Kino-Québec, 1999*b*: 14).

Other studies note that if overweight youth wish to improve their lipid profile, they must take part in physical activities of average- to high- intensity over a relatively long period. However, studies also show that adults can obtain benefits through less intense activity (Kino-Québec, 2000: 16). In the same vein, studies carried out on obese children deemed at-risk of developing cardiovascular disease conclude that a substantial level of physical activity is necessary to significantly change the energy balance (Després, Bouchard and Malina, 1990: 253). In fact, a distinction is now made between the level of exercise needed to obtain general health benefits and that required to affect the fitness level, with the latter requiring a higher level of activity (Butcher, 1996: 277). Thus, some health outcomes will require greater physical activity than is usually recommended by general guides.

Our review of the physical effects of participating in physical activity would be incomplete if it failed to take into account possible negative effects, in particular those related to participation in sports. Most such potentially negative effects are linked to practising sports in an intensive or even excessive manner. These negative effects are of concern because of the growing number of youth practising increasingly competitive sports or following rigorous training programs (Bailey and Rasmussen, 1996: 187).[13] This trend raises the question of the age at which a young person is physically and mentally prepared to participate in a highly competitive sports activity. In this regard, Bailey and Rasmussen note a lack of knowledge of the physiological responses of children and youth to extreme exercise (1996: 187).

Gretchen A. Kerr notes that injuries, eating disorders, burnout, and high stress levels are commonly associated with athletic experiences (Kerr, 1996: 293). In addition to the risk of injury, physical activity that is too intense can give rise to health problems, including delayed maturation and menstrual dysfunction, and it can also affect skeletal integrity (Bailey and Rasmussen, 1996: 193). For a long time, people believed that "the younger we start a child, the better the chances of his or her becoming an adult champion."

Now, however, a growing number of specialists feel that children who start competing too early in life run a major risk of wearing themselves out or losing their motivation before they have reached their full potential (Bailey and Rasmussen, 1996: 193). Some authors note that a growing number of highly active girls have eating disorders. Caroline Davis notes that female athletes are frequently identified as a population group at risk for developing eating disorders, and similar disorders have been observed among dancers (Davis, 1999: 97). While it may be excessive to claim that sport is responsible for eating disorders, certain aspects of sport, including the obsession with thinness and the need to exercise constraint in social situations, may influence young athletes.

[13] Peter Donnelly (1997) makes an interesting comparison between child labour and sport labour in high performance sport. He proposes child labour laws for sport. Jay Coakley notes a tendency in United States to promote the performance ethic and competition in youth sport (2001: 113)

Finally, the risk of injury during sporting activities also applies to young people. Health Canada data demonstrate that the proportion of injuries occurring in sports facilities is 27 percent for boys in the sixth grade, 34 percent for boys in the eighth grade and 46 percent for those in the tenth grade (Health Canada, 1999: 89)[14]. Unintentional injuries are the main cause of death among young people 6 to 12 years of age; consequently, prevention is extremely important (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health, 1999; Ansett, 1995).

Gaps in Knowledge

- We do not know the level of physical activity that will have a beneficial effect on the growth and health of youth. In an effort to close this gap in knowledge, researchers frequently refer to two informal hypotheses. One suggests that "more is better," that is, the higher the rate of participation, the better the outcomes for the dependent variables. Another suggests that "some participation" is enough to produce a positive correlation. Both these hypotheses remain in circulation.

- As noted by the 1992 International Consensus Symposium on Physical Activity, Fitness, and Health, many results are based on short-term studies comparing physically active and physically inactive youth.[15] Other studies focus on young elite athletes, and these have limited relevance to the general population of youth. Therefore, there is a lack of analysis of the influence and impact of *long-term* physical activity on human health in general. In addition, there is a lack of *longitudinal* studies, even though it is only such studies that would allow us to assess the impact for adults of physical activity in youth.

- The literature dealing with the effects of recreation on the physical and biological development of youth focus essentially on sport. Few studies deal with types of recreation that link physical skills and social skills (for example, Scouts and Guides, outdoor camps, playgrounds, and so on).

- The literature deals essentially with the effects of participation, and much less with the effects of *non-participation*. When studies do analyze the effects of non-participation, it is often in the context of a discussion of the effects, including longer-term effects, of corpulence in children. That said, not all inactive children suffer from excessive weight, and sedentary lifestyles are thought to lead to more problems than obesity. Greater knowledge of the effects of non-participation on the physical and biological development of youth is all the more crucial, given the rise in inactivity among youth which will be reported below.

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[14] For young girls, percentages are lower, but increase with age. However, the study makes no distinction between injuries occurring during structured recreational activities and those occurring during non-structured activities. The *Alberta Sport and Recreation Injury Survey* reports that 13 percent of respondents from 6 to 19 years of age have sustained injuries while engaged in sports or recreational (Mummery and Spence, 1999).

[15] The Saskatchewan Growth Study is an example of a study comparing active and inactive youth between 8 and 16 years of age (cited in Malina, 1994: 924). However, Craig, Russell and Cameron mention no significant difference between inactive and active youth in reported chronic conditions, acute restrictions, physicians visits or nights spent in hospital (1995: 1000).

- Although many studies have been carried out on adult populations, we lack knowledge regarding the influence of heredity on the way youth respond to physical activity. For example, the Consensus Symposium concluded that where heredity appears to be the major factor, regular physical activity has no apparent effect on commonly used indices of biological maturation or on statural growth (Bouchard, Shepard and Stephens, 1994: 61). In addition, one of the principal problems for studies analyzing the effects of physical activity on the development of youth consists in separating the role of heredity from that of training, and in explaining individual variations in the results obtained.

1.2 The Impact of Recreation on the Psychosocial Development of Youth

Adolescence constitutes an important period in the development of personal identity. Relationships with parents and family change with the search for independence. Once young people acquire independence, they acquire opportunities to explore their potential and develop skills. Adolescence is also characterized by a certain detachment from the egocentricity of childhood and a greater ability to put oneself in another person's position. This improved predisposition for understanding others is accompanied by an ability to assume responsibility for and display behaviour viewed as moral or ethical, thereby reflecting a certain social awareness. Throughout adolescence, friendship plays a crucial role in the development of identity and a sense of belonging. For better or for worse, peers have an influence on the development of self-image and identity. Adolescence, marked by an individual's first love relationships, also constitutes an important period in the development of sexual identity.[16]

All authors agree that adolescence constitutes a critical period in the development of identity and self-concept.[17] Shaw, Kleiber and Caldwell refer to adolescence theorists who maintain that a lack of sense of self and low identity development characterize the first stages of adolescence, whereas psychosocial maturity and a coherent sense of self is the final stage in successful identity formation (1995: 247). For Jean Côté and John Hay, the search for identity forms part of the overall socialization process. "Socialization is a lifelong process through which individuals develop their self concept, identity, attitudes, dispositions, and behaviours. ... Socialization refers to a process by which individuals develop their conceptions of who they are and how they relate to each other through their social interactions" (forthcoming: 4). According to Kleiber, Larson and Csikszentmihalyi, certain recreational activities are especially beneficial, since they facilitate the transition towards adulthood by allowing young people to acquire the skills needed in the world of adults (cited in Scales and Leffert, 1999).

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[16] Several works devoted to research on adolescence refer to changes observed in adolescence in similar terms. For example, see Hendry, *et al.* (1993); Gullota, Adams and Montemayor (1990); Coleman (1961); Bouillin-Dartevelle (1984); Scales and Leffert (1999); and Côté and Hay (forthcoming).

[17] Hendry, *et al.*, cite Erik H. Eriskson, who believes that "the search for identity becomes especially acute during adolescence as a result of rapid changes in the biological, social and psychological aspects of the individuals, and because of the necessity for occupational decisions to be made, ideals to be accepted or rejected and sexual and friendship choices to be determined." For Erikson, identity formation is the leading experience of adolescence (Hendry, *et al.*, 1993: 7). Laufer and Laufer maintain that the development of sexual identity is the psychological experience that differentiates adolescence from childhood or adulthood (Hendry, *et al.*, 1993: 8).

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Several researchers maintain that recreation plays a beneficial role in the process of self-exploration by reinforcing self-esteem and self-concept, essential elements in creating a general feeling of well-being.[18] Recreation is also believed to affect self-esteem by creating the feeling of being in control. According to Janice Butcher, it is imperative for adolescents to explore these feelings during the transition to adulthood (1996: 277; see also Raphael, 1993).

Craig, Russell and Cameron report that in 71 percent of pre-experimental studies, 74 percent of quasi-experimental studies and 58 percent of experimental studies, those who participated in physical activity reported an increase in self-esteem, and that this relationship is observable in all age groups (1995: 67). Leonard Wankel arrives at similar conclusions, noting that those who take part in physical activity have a more positive self-image, regardless of their age (Wankel, *et al.*, 1994). Taking part in structured physical activity could also affect self-esteem, inasmuch as it promotes acceptance among peers. For example, in his study of youth between 9 and 12 years of age, Dunn shows that ability demonstrated by students in their physical education classes increases their popularity among the other students and friends and, in general, results in a more socially satisfying school experience (Dunn, 1996). American research arrives at similar conclusions regarding participation in structured extra-curricular activities (Weiss and Duncan, 1992).

Most authors note a high correlation between participation in structured recreation and a heightened sense of self-esteem, although variables such as personal characteristics and type of activity seem to influence this relationship. After reviewing the American literature on this topic, Edward McAuley notes that participants who seem to gain the most self-esteem are precisely those who lacked it the most when they first started participating in recreation (McAuley, 1994: 553). According to a large American study, for example, physical activity has an even greater effect on the self-esteem of children with disabilities (Gruber, 1986). In addition, Shaw, Kleiber and Caldwell found in their study of the effects of various forms of recreation on identity formation that results vary by gender and according to the kind of recreation. In their study, structured recreation is more conducive than non-structured recreation to identity development, and the impact of recreation on identity formation is different for girls than for boys (1995: 245).[19]

Moreover, not all recreation activities reinforce self-esteem positively. For example, in certain cases, physical activity may be associated with a distorted body image and an unrealistic desire to lose weight, or may co-exist with an unhealthy life-style (Davis 1999). Offord, Hanna and Hoult note that "participation in recreation programs can result in increased self-esteem, but in many cases apparently does not" (1992: 2).[20]

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[18] Self-esteem is generally considered to be the evaluative component of self-concept. The two terms are often used interchangeably (McAuley, 1994: 552).

[19] Unlike boys, girls do not see sport as an integral part of their identity. The relationship between participation in sports and identity formation among girls manifests itself in an indirect fashion (through the acquisition of greater independence, for example). For these authors, participation in sports is of special benefit to girls, since it provides them with experiences beyond the realm of female stereotypes (Shaw, Kleiber and Caldwell, 1995).

[20] Similarly, McAuley notes that 60 percent of the studies establish a positive correlation between engaging in physical activity and self-esteem, though most of the studies suffer from methodological deficiencies (1994: 553). McAuley notes other beneficial effects associated with physical activity, including a negative correlation with stress, anxiety and depression, and a positive correlation with self-perception, mood and affect (McAuley, 1994: 551).

Therefore, not all researchers share the same unbounded optimism when it comes to the effects of structured recreation on the development of self-esteem, due in part to the methodological deficiencies from which several studies on this subject suffer. However, they all accept the generally positive correlation with self-esteem, while noting a need for further research on the subject (McAuley, 1994: 553).[21] Also, if many studies focus on the impact of participation on self-esteem, the impact of non-participation has not been studied. Therefore, we can draw no conclusions about the effects of non-participation for self-esteem, and in particular whether it is associated with lower self-esteem.

The self-esteem variable is the subject of many studies of the psychosocial development of youth. Researchers concur that low self-esteem merits attention, since it is often associated with young people thought to be at-risk of developing antisocial behaviour (McKay, *et al.*, 1996: 285). There is also a strong link between low self-esteem and anxiety, depression and suicide (Craig, Russell and Cameron, 1995).

There is nothing new in the idea that recreational activities keep youth off the street and out of trouble, help build character and encourage the taking of calculated risks. It dates back to the 19th century, long before systematic research was conducted on the subject and when recreation was considered a way to control delinquent behaviour in adolescents (Craig, Russell and Cameron, 1995: 58).[22] Several studies show that participation in structured recreation is less likely than non-participation to be associated with deviant behaviour (Shields and Bredemeier, 1995: 181). There are two types of studies on this subject in Canada, those evaluating structured recreation as a way to prevent delinquency, and those evaluating structured recreation as a tool to help clients who are considered delinquent.

For the studies that see recreation as a way to prevent deviant behaviour, the question is whether structured recreation has a positive influence on individual decision-making and smart risk-taking. This question is important for adolescents who are searching for an identity or heavily influenced by their peers. Some studies show that participation in sports can foster positive lifestyle choices (Cowie Bonne, 2000; Wankel and Sefton, 1994).[23] For example, physically active youth are less likely to smoke or take drugs than those who do are not active (Montepelare, Yardley and Kanters, 1993; Stephens and Craig, 1990; Spence and Poon, 1997).

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[21] This remark also applies to studies dealing with the impact of recreation on other variables affecting identity, including "self-concept" and "self-efficacy." John Spence and Pauline Poon (1997) maintain that the link between physical activity and self-concept, though the object of several studies, is far from clear. In their view, recent studies raise serious questions about the magnitude of change in self-concept that may be expected from participating in physical activity. Their study on adults suggests that the benefits of physical activity on global self-concept are overstated in the literature on physical and exercise.

[22] Caroline Andrew, Jean Harvey and Don Dawson note that, during the 1930s and the 1940s, the view of recreation as a cure for social problems (including juvenile delinquency) dominated in Canada. This was less true by the mid-1940s, in part because social welfare professionals had acquired a more complex understanding of the links between delinquency and social conditions (1994: 7).

[23] American studies reveal that physically active girls have fewer sexual encounters, fewer sexual partners, are older when they have sexual intercourse for the first time, use contraceptives more often, and have lower rates of early pregnancy than girls who are not physically active (Repucci, 1987; Miller, *et al.*, 1999).

In this sense, youth who practise physical activity are found to be more aware of the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle. Given that the literature is abundant in this area, it was to be expected that this hypothesis would be subject to a number of important qualifications dealing with, for example, the strong relationship between alcohol or drug consumption and participation in certain forms of recreation.[24] As Caldwell and Darling (1999) note, drinking, illegal drug use, delinquency and sexual experimentation often occur within the context of social recreation, although this behaviour occurs more frequently when the recreation is non-structured and young people have greater freedom of action.

Influenced by studies demonstrating the potential benefits of structured recreation on the development of cognitive functions,[25] some authors have analyzed the impact of extracurricular activities on academic achievement and on dropping out of school. For example, American researchers have demonstrated a negative relationship between participation in structured extracurricular activities and dropping out. The relationship established is as follows: participation in these activities increases the drive or need to be in school; this in turn leads to a decrease in absenteeism in class and hence fewer dropouts (Mahoney and Cairns, 1997; Catteral, 1998). These studies point to the possibility of using extracurricular activities as a supplementary tool in conjunction with other types of intervention for improving the motivation of students who have a high risk of dropping out. However, Canadian research in this area is almost non-existent (Beauregard and Ouellet, 1995: 379).

Recreation is also thought to decrease boredom, a factor that the literature links to the development of deviant behaviour and unhealthy habits among youth.[26] It has been shown that youth who participate in appropriate recreation experience less boredom and, consequently, lower rates of deviant behaviour (McKay, *et al.*, 1996: 285).

A negative correlation between structured recreation and delinquency has been found in the case of elementary and secondary level students from disadvantaged socioeconomic environments (Wankel and Berger, 1991; Shields and Bredemeier, 1995). Jones and Offord observed that when youth from underprivileged backgrounds in the Ottawa region enrolled in skill-development programs, there was a significant decrease in their antisocial behaviour outside the home and school. However, their participation in these programs had only a very marginal impact on their academic performance.

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[24] On this topic, see the studies by Wankel and Sefton (1994); Compton and Iso-Ahola (1994); Caldwell and Smith (1994); and Donnelly (cited in Coakley, 2001: 160). Other authors, including Suzanne Laberge and Guy Thibault (1993) provide some disturbing facts on the attitudes of young athletes with regard to doping in sport.

[25] One of the most influential studies in this area is that by H. Lavallée and Roy Shepard carried out on students in the city of Trois-Rivières, Québec (cited in Shepard, 1983). Following an analysis of supplementary daily periods of in-class physical activity given to students between the ages of 6 and 11, the authors conclude that the academic performance of participating students was equal to or better than that of the control group that had participated only in their usual physical education classes. The result was obtained in spite of the attendant decrease in teaching time devoted to other subjects. The Lavallée and Shepard studies confirm data obtained abroad reporting that those who participate in recreation obtain academic results that are equal to or greater than those who do not participate (Kerr, 1996: 295).

[26] American researchers Linda Caldwell and Seppo Iso-Ahola in particular have conducted numerous studies on the link between boredom and manifestations of deviant or unhealthy behaviour. See Iso-Ahola and Crowley (1991); Caldwell and Smith (1994); Carruthers and Busser (1995); and Henderson (1993).

Jones and Offord conclude that it is less expensive to set up such programs than to pay the eventual social costs (vandalism and police services) of not setting them up (1989). The results of this study confirm those of Gina Browne, *et al.* (1999) on youth whose parents are welfare recipients.

In another study based on the *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*, Offord, Lipman and Duku note that participation in unsupervised sports and in artistic activities made independent contributions to reducing the rate of psychosocial problems among children (1998: 12). However, this time the authors find that the effects on the psychosocial behaviour of youth are the same regardless of whether or not they come from poor families, a finding that qualifies yet again the conclusions of previous studies.

In fact, Offord, Lipman and Duku (1998) note that it is difficult to decide whether youth who participate in activities have fewer problems, or whether youth who from the outset are less predisposed to experiencing psychosocial problems are also more likely to take part in recreational activities. Moreover, they do not know if other variables, such as having especially competent parents, explain or influence the results. These are the types of questions researchers must ask if they wish to obtain scientifically valid results. In addition to the methodological concerns already mentioned, Donnelly and Harvey note that in several cases the effects of physical activity on individual development are statistically significant, but far from reliable, while some studies do not take into account partial results (1996: 6). Indeed, lack of sound scientific data constitutes one of the principal weaknesses of such studies.

The situation is even worst for the study of forms of structured recreation other than sports. Supervised artistic activities, for example, have received very little attention in Canada and results are mixed. Lindsay John, Robin Wright and William Rowe attribute the ambivalent results to the overall lack of research on the subject and to the methodological weaknesses of the studies that have been carried out (John, Wright and Rowe, 2000: 10). So again we observe the costs of insufficient attention and lack of empirical evidence when it comes to the impact of artistic activities on the psychosocial development of youth.

Other studies examine ways that structured recreation can help young "delinquents." Structured recreation plays a positive role in the sense that participation takes up time that might otherwise be spent with other young delinquents. It also promotes respect for authority, often personified by the adult in charge of the recreation program (McKay, *et al.* 1996; Dunn, 1996).

Some studies suggest that structured recreation may promote the development of socially desirable – even moral – behaviour. For these studies, the challenge is to identify the types of interventions that are the most useful, and conditions under which they must take place to have a real impact on recidivism. Easley maintains that, for young delinquents, the benefits of taking part in structured outdoor programs are numerous, and have a positive effect on self-esteem and self-empowerment, as well as on the short-term rate for recidivism. Nevertheless, the effects of participation fall off when the young people return to their usual environment, and after five years the young delinquents who take part in these programs display the same rate of recidivism as non-participants (Easley, 1991: 148).

Certain activities and types of supervision are more likely than others to have a therapeutic effect on young delinquents. Jacques Hébert (1998) notes that participation by young delinquents in martial arts programs does not automatically reduce aggressive behaviour. Instruction that focuses exclusively on self-defence techniques can even increase aggressive behaviour among individuals who already display this tendency.[27] Support for this point can be found in the numerous articles on violence in sports, including the violence displayed by young hockey players (Morra and Smith, 1996).

The conclusion is that if high-risk youth are to benefit from the positive effects deriving from certain types of activity, the activity must include a cognitive and social component. They must form constructive alliances with their peers and instructors, and with the service providers associated with the activity in question (Hébert, 1998; Quinney, 2000).

There is currently a debate on whether participation by youth in recreation promotes moral behaviour, or what might be called moral development. "Moral development is defined as the evolution of a person's grasp of the interpersonal rights and responsibilities that characterize social life" (Shields and Bredemeier, 2001: 585). In a recent literature review on this topic, Shields and Bredemeier identified a list of the questions that have been tackled by researchers. Particularly pertinent to this paper are the following (2001: 591): "How does sport influence attachment to the value of fairness relative to other values? What is the relationship between sport participation and moral reasoning? How does involvement in sport relate to prescriptive moral judgments? How can physical education and sports experience be used to promote positive character development?"

Opinion is divided on all of these issues. On one hand, there are those who believe that, given certain conditions, participating in sports can promote moral development. On the other hand, there are those who view recreation as a "morally neutral" endeavour, that is, one in which the development of moral behaviour may or may not arise, just as in any other endeavour.[28] Authors who are less optimistic with regard to the moral virtues of recreation emphasize that such activities place too much emphasis on competition. They note that the competitive drive can even lead to antisocial or immoral behaviour, including violence and the use of anabolic steroids.

Gretchen Kerr notes that recreational activities, sport practised within a school setting and moderate competition are more likely than high-performance sport to further the moral development of youth (1996: 293). In addition, some American studies on young athletes invalidate the assumption that taking part in sport has a positive effect on moral development. It is observed that those who participate in certain types of sport demonstrate less moral development than young non-participants (Shields and Bredemeier, 1995: 189; Shogan, 1988: 319).

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[27] The most frequently cited study on this question is by Trulson, an American who analyzed the impact of Tae Kwon Do instruction on the behaviour of young delinquents. He maintains that understanding the philosophical and traditional dimensions of Tae Kwon Do is a pre-requisite to acquiring its moral and social skills, and must be taught by a qualified and sensitive instructor. For a summary of this study, see Shields and Bredemeier (1995) and Hébert (1998).

[28] Certain American works are devoted to the question. Shields and Bredemeier, for example, provide an overall examination of character development and physical activity among youth (1995: 174). Also of note are the articles by Shogan (1988) and Weiss and Bredemeier (1990: 331).

Nonetheless, it is possible to reconcile the two positions by concluding that structured recreation, including sport, may be considered moral to the extent that behaviour, attitudes and decisions all draw attention to considerations of a moral nature. This is why most authors maintain that structured recreation may indeed lead to moral development – provided that moral issues in fact play a role, and as long as the adults in charge inform the young people that the issue at hand and its resolution are of a moral nature (Shields and Bredemeier, 1995:189). For example, some research notes the crucial role coaches may play in providing the right moral atmosphere (Shields and Bredemeier, 2001).[29]

Others emphasize the importance of involving youth in decision-making (Shogan, 1988: 320; Coakley, 2001: 118).[30] Still others believe that certain activities have a particularly beneficial effect on the moral development of youth, at least to the extent that the development of individual and social skills is the first objective of the program of activities. For example, the Scout movement[31] and structured outdoor programs aim explicitly at getting youth to develop their personal skills, especially outdoor skills and social skills such as cooperativeness and respect for others (Easley, 1991).[32] Unfortunately, very few studies in Canada have focussed on these programs.

Another area of study that is extremely relevant but inadequately explored by Canadian researchers is the effect of recreational activities during youth on one's sense of civic responsibility and future political involvement. We know that recreation plays a special role in developing social networks and close friendships. During childhood, social relationships gravitate around family members. It is only during adolescence that individuals become aware that they belong to a much wider community (Hendry, *et al.*, 1993; Scales and Leffert, 1999). Their sense of belonging to a community is then expressed through getting involved socially or politically.

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29 Research has demonstrated that the strong temptation to play unfairly is associated with perceptions of (1) greater approval of behaviours designed to obtain an unfair advantage over an opponent, (2) the belief that more of their teammates would play unfairly in the same situation, and (3) longer involvement with the current team (Shields and Bredemeier, 2001:596)

30 The debate pits the proponents of structured recreation against those of non-structured recreation. Kino-Québec maintains that the benefits associated with physical activity are more likely to be achieved if youth obtain professional coaching or supervision, since young people see such supervision as embodying codes of behaviour that will help them develop social skills (Kino-Québec, 1998: 19). On the other hand, Shogan (1988) and Coakley (2001) maintain that structured recreation is less likely to give rise to moral behaviour, inasmuch as the child is not directly involved in decision-making.

31 "The purpose of the world organization of the Scout movement is to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potential as individuals, as responsible citizens and as member of their local, national and international communities" (Racicot and Marshall, 1998). In particular, Racicot and Marshall examine the possibility that taking part in the Scout movement fosters the social integration of immigrant youths and of their families, thereby raising the issue of social integration through recreation.

32 An American study on the Boys and Girls Clubs of America notes that the research in this field is extremely limited, which seems to be all the more true for Canada. The author identified significant impacts on the development of social skills amongst young people (Anderson-Butcher, 2000).

A number of authors have drawn on this knowledge, as well as on the teachings of Alexis de Tocqueville, to develop an approach to political participation.[33] Some studies advance the hypothesis that structured activities during youth will promote a sense of civic responsibility and greater involvement in civil and political life during adulthood. Some American research, including that of Jennifer Glanville, suggests that participation by young people in extracurricular activities can influence political involvement and behaviour during adulthood (Glanville, 1999; McNeal, 1999; Holland and Andre, 1987).[34]

A recent study by Statistics Canada supports this idea. By drawing on the 1997 *National Survey of Volunteering, Giving and Participating*, Frank Jones (2000) assesses the degree to which people who participate in organized activities during their youth will get involved in community involvement in adulthood. He claims that individuals who participated in youth organizations such as the Guides or Scouts, get more involved than adults who never participated in such activities (Jones, 2000: 16).

Once again, the authors working in this area must confront the issue of self-selection. They find it particularly difficult to determine whether the individuals most likely to participate in recreation when they are young come from the same group as those most likely to become politically and civically active once they reach adulthood. While some studies, including the one conducted by Glanville, control for this kind of variable, others only give the appearance of doing so (Glanville, 1999: 281).[35] Such studies are highly optimistic, since they assume that recreation will close the gap in political participation between different social groups. But to attain this objective, the disparities among groups in terms of participation in recreation must be reduced; these disparities are the focus of the following section.

There are also authors who see recreation as an opportunity to create social capital or promote social cohesion and, by extension, the health of democracy. Canadian authors rarely go this far but a number of American and British studies make the claim that recreation provides a way to create "social capital." They therefore maintain that recreation should be raised to the level of a citizenship right and receive appropriate public support. Unfortunately, these studies have not examined youth in particular.[36] Moreover, these studies focus on the impact of participation and do not address non-participation. For the moment, we cannot say that non-participation in structured recreation leads to weaker moral development, lower civic competencies or less social capital.

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[33] The studies by Robert Putnam (1995) fall within this line of reasoning by suggesting that certain forms of recreation contribute to the creation of social capital, which is an essential component of democracy and democratic citizenship.

[34] Glanville's study analyzes the impact of participation in extracurricular activities at the secondary level on involvement and political behaviour in early adulthood (1999). It maintains that other studies must be carried out to determine whether the effects persist beyond early adulthood. Holland and Andre (1987) note that there is lack of empirical evidence allowing us to demonstrate with greater certainty a causal relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and certain types of behaviour.

[35] Jennifer Glanville (1999) observes that none of the studies examining the impact of extracurricular activities on future political involvement control for this variable.

[36] See Hemingway (1999); Coalter (1998); and Laker (2000). One French work is *Sports, jeunesses et logiques d'insertion*, edited by Michel Ansett and Bertrand Sachs (1996).

Sport could prove to be an important vehicle for social integration and social cohesion. Noting that due to discrimination based on race, class and gender there is unequal access to sport, a European movement called *Sport for All* brought pressure to bear on certain international organizations such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe. This has resulted in the promulgation of various charters and declarations supporting the principle of making sport available to all. For example, the Council of Europe officially recognizes the role played by sport in promoting integration and social cohesion. It is recommending that governments of member states develop policies and programs targeting youth, and aiming to foster personal growth and greater involvement in society through participation in sport. It is also encouraging governments and NGOs to use sport in their struggle against social exclusion (Donnelly, 2000; Harvey, 1999).

Article 31 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, of which Canada is a signatory, "recognizes the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts." To this end, it states that "parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational, and leisure activity" (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989).

The Sport for All movement has received some attention in Canada, but for a variety of historical, political and cultural reasons it has failed to obtain support from authorities. Canadian authors and politicians rarely raise the idea of using recreation as a vehicle for promoting social integration and social cohesion, nor do they promote universal access to recreation. This remains an essentially European concept and movement (Donnelly, 2000; Harvey, 1999).

Gaps in Knowledge

- Many of the studies suffer from methodological weaknesses, and most authors stress a continuing need for scientifically sound research to evaluate the effects of structured activities on the psychosocial development of youth.

- Longitudinal studies are needed in order to evaluate the extent to which the psychosocial benefits of recreation persist as people grow older.

- Few studies discuss the gender or age group differences associated with participation in recreation, and even fewer explain the reasons for these differences.[37]

- We still do not know the level of activity required to obtain positive outcomes for self-esteem, or for the prevention of and decrease in rates of delinquency and of dropping out.

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[37] Stephens, who carried out a study among several age groups on the relationship between physical activity and mental health, shows that women obtain greater psychological benefits than men, and older age groups enjoy greater benefits than younger ones (Craig, Russell and Cameron, 1995: 53).

- The literature dealing with the psychosocial effects of recreation contains a vast number of studies on the effects of physical activity but a much smaller number dealing with the effects of other types of activity. Therefore, our understanding of the psychosocial benefits of other forms of recreational activity is far too limited.

- In certain cases, while there may be a connection between taking part in recreation and the results obtained, the causes often remain obscure and may sometimes be linked to other intervening factors. In addition, the contamination effects of self-selection are rarely controlled and may significantly influence the results.[38]

- Jennifer Tipper and Denise Avard note the need for further research on factors that give rise to harmful as well as beneficial forms of behaviour among youth (1999: 20).[39]

- The effects of recreation on mental health, including the reduction of stress, anxiety and depression, have provided the focus of studies on adults, but not on young people between the ages of 10 and 15, despite the fact that in recent years the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health (1999) has identified a deterioration in the mental health of adolescent Canadians. American studies, however, reveal that active girls feel less distress or anxiety, and are less depressed than those who are physically inactive (Kino-Québec, 1999*a*).

- Shaw, Kleiber and Caldwell (1995) point to the lack of studies on the effects of recreation on identity formation in adolescence, despite the fact that adolescence is the key time for identity development.

- Tipper and Avard remind us that the concepts of social networking, social skills, social cohesion and personal involvement are employed increasingly in discussions on child development and health issues (1999: 18). However, in Canada, not much attention has been paid to recreation, in spite of the fact that it may turn out to be one of the most decisive means of acquiring civic skills.

- Because studies focus only on the effects of participation on youth psychosocial development, we do not know the effects of non-participation on youth self-esteem and moral development or on the production of social capital or civic competencies.

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[38] Studies have shown that youth said to be at risk display a preference for non-competitive, informal activities that involve taking chances. This preference provides a disincentive for taking part in recreation, and consequently leads to the drawing of positive conclusions regarding the impact of structured recreation on delinquency rates (Reid, *et al.*, 1994).

[39] Tipper and Avard (1999) lament the dearth of studies on the decision-making process among youth. Most available data is based on adult behaviour. However, certain factors (including the influence of peers) that affect the way young people make decisions, may be weighted differently.

2.0 Factors Limiting Youth Access to Structured Recreation

When we consider the possible benefits of structured recreation on the physical and psychosocial development of youth, the need to discuss the factors limiting access to participation becomes immediately apparent. Indeed, we cannot avoid a broader reflection on the social environment in which the activities take place and on the factors that limit – or favour – young people's access to them. For authors assessing the access of youth to recreation, such an omission could only be at the expense of youth, and at the risk of seeing the benefits of recreation elude those who need them the most (Offord, Lipman and Duku, 1998; Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001).

2.1 Youth – A Group at Risk

In recent years, studies attempting to identify inactive or sedentary Canadians have reached similar conclusions.[40] Although youth are not the population group most likely to be inactive, studies show a fall in youth activity levels and a decline of their fitness over the years (Kino-Québec, 2000; Sub-Committee on the Study of Sport in Canada, 1998).

"In Canada, Wankel and Mummery (1996) recently indicated that approximately 40 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 participated in sport at least once a week. The comparable participation rates for 15 to 19 year olds is approximately 35 percent" (cited in Côté and Hay, forthcoming). According to benchmarks for healthy development, only about 40 percent of Canadian children and youth are adequately physically active (Federal/Provincial/ Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health, 2000). In fact, young Canadians appear to be up to 40 percent less active than youth of 30 years ago (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 1993). Efforts to encourage young people to engage in non-physical activities are intensifying. Among young North Americans, decreased physical activity is associated with increased weight and obesity, a phenomenon attributable not only to a more sedentary lifestyle, but also to the consumption of calorie-rich foods (Stephens and Craig, 1990; Bar-Or, 1994; Tremblay and Willms, 2000; Kino-Québec, 1998).

Thus, today's youth may risk lapsing into a sedentary lifestyle. Some groups of young people, among them young girls and youth from disadvantaged socioeconomic environments, seem particularly at risk. More often than not, inactive children and adolescents live in communities with fewer than 1,000 residents. We might be tempted to believe that small municipalities are less successful than larger municipalities in meeting young people's needs for physical activities (Craig, *et al.*, cited in Donnelly and Harvey, 1996: 28). However, the data are far from conclusive. Peter McLaren's survey of Ontario children, for example, found that small-town youth take part in more physical and sporting activities than young people living in cities (1999: 6).

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[40] Donnelly and Harvey (1996) refer to the 1983 *Canada Fitness Survey*, the 1990 *Campbell Survey*, the 1993 *Health Promotion Survey*, the 1995 *Profile of Physically Inactive Canadians*, and the 1995 *Ontario Health Survey*.

Given the declining physical activity among youth, many researchers are trying to explain this phenomenon. Since the matter is raised mostly by people concerned about young people's health and level of physical activity, studies of the factors that shape patterns of youth participation in physical and sporting activities are more numerous than those dealing with other types of structured activities. Further, we lack the chronological data needed to determine whether today's young people are less active than previous generations of youth in organized non-sport recreation.

2.2 Selecting a Model to List the Factors Limiting Participation

The past 20 years have seen a relatively large body of research on the social, economic and cultural factors that shape patterns of youth involvement in structured recreation. Although gender and socioeconomic conditions appear to be the determining factors in youth participation, other determinants also come into play. In fact, not all authors agree on the weight to be attributed to the various factors or how to classify them.[41] Although the field of study is somewhat chaotic, more ambitious studies attempt to summarize the various factors that, according to many authors, limit access to recreation.[42]

Peter Donnelly and Jean Harvey (1996) propose a model that enables us to comprehend and categorize the factors constraining access to what they term "active living." They divide these factors into three categories of barriers: (1) *infrastructural barriers* (or material means to access), (2) *superstructural barriers* (or limits originating from the spheres of ideas and perceptions), and (3) *procedural barriers* (or limits emerging from the social support and the service delivery process). Their model is based on the postulate that the socioeconomic factors produce significant inequalities and systemic barriers to participation (see Figure 3).

Although the model was first applied to any systemic barriers that limit access to active living, it can be employed to study participation in structured recreation of all sorts. We will use the three-part model to analyze the systemic barriers that, in the estimation of Canadian authors, are most likely to affect youth participation: socioeconomic conditions, age, gender, environmental influences, and structures. Each of the three sections will begin with a detailed explanation of the barrier, based on Donnelly and Harvey's typology. We will also suggest a few approaches that may be helpful in assessing the impact of lifestyle changes on youth participation. We consider the barriers or constraints (rather than the trends) that appear to make structured recreation less appealing to young people.

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[41] For example, barriers can be described in terms of physical, social, psychological, environmental, structural and systemic causes (Donnelly and Harvey, 1996) or in terms of intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints and structural constraints (Raymore, Godbey and Crawford, 1994). Some researchers prefer the concept of constraint to that of barrier, since they consider the former to be more inclusive. We will use these two terms interchangeably, as synonyms for "factors limiting youth participation." For more on this debate, see the article by Raymore, Codbey and Crawford (1994).

[42] See, among others, the works of Offord, Lipman and Duku (1998); Raymore, Godbey and Crawford (1994); Jackson and Rucks (1995); and Donnelly and Harvey (1996).

Figure 3
Three Types of Barriers Limiting Youth Participation

Infrastructural Barriers	→	Limits emerging from costs, lack of transportation and time, location and availability of facilities.
Superstructural Barriers	→	Limits emerging from the nature of activities, cultural ideas and prejudices.
Procedural Barriers	→	Limits emerging from a lack of social support, organizational structures and management arrangements.

Source: Adapted from Donnelly and Harvey (1996).

Infrastructural Barriers to Participation in Structured Recreation

First, Donnelly and Harvey mention the barriers associated with the material aspects of participation. These constraints include costs, time, transportation and facilities. Discussion about this type of barrier to access falls into two categories: the literature on the impact of economic inequalities on youth participation, and the literature on factors that limit youth participation that have been cited either by young people themselves or their parents.

The Literature Itemizing the Constraints Identified by Youth and their Parents

Young people attending the five Youth Forums held in 1995 and 1996 in British Columbia identified a number of barriers to their involvement in recreational activities. Among these factors were lack of money and difficulty in accessing activities owing to transportation problems and the location of facilities (Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture of British Columbia, 1997). Other surveys point to similar constraints. According to Ian Reid, *et al.* (1994), the principal infrastructural barriers impeding participation in recreational activities by youth at risk appear to be a lack of money to pay for the costs of programs or equipment, lack of public transportation and costly private transportation, and time.[43]

Peter McLaren's survey of Ontario parents showed that costs and scheduling were the main reasons cited by parents to explain why youth do not take part in some activities. Costs are a more acute problem for low-income families, while scheduling is a more serious hurdle for high-income families (1999: 24). A poll conducted by the Canadian Council on Social Development (2001) in collaboration with the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association found that municipal recreation user fees discourage participation by youth from low-income families.

[43] In the *Canada Fitness Survey* and the *Campbell Survey on Well-Being in Canada*, lack of time, competing time demands, and lack of facilities were identified as the major constraints on youth involvement (Craig, Russell and Cameron, 1995: 82).

In some provinces, user fees are widespread and, in certain cases, have increased. Also, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Heath (2000) notes that off-campus sports and recreation activities have become prohibitively expensive, which is a result of user fees and the cost of travel and equipment.

If costs, transportation and time constraints are frequently cited in surveys and polls of youth and their parents, it is still difficult to conclude that these constraints are really the most decisive. Raymore, Godbey and Crawford (1994) point out that it is easier for participants and their parents to identify barriers associated with the material aspects of participation than those related to less tangible social or cultural factors.

The Literature on the Impact of Economic Inequalities on Youth Participation

It seems clear to researchers that economic inequalities constitute the most important infrastructural barrier. The vast majority of authors point out that where participation in recreation is concerned, there are significant differences between youth from low-income families and those from middle- or high-income families. More than any other type of activity, structured recreational activities and those requiring expensive equipment and instruction show the greatest inequalities in the participation among youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Torrance, 1998; Offord, Last and Barrette, 1985; Offord, Lipman and Duku, 1998; Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001; Gouvernement du Québec, 1994). Offord, Lipman and Duku (1998) also report that participation in physical and artistic activities is particularly low and irregular for poor children. In artistic and community activities, as well as in supervised sports, the situation is described as critical (Offord, Lipman, Duku, 1998).[44]

In addition, Jean-Louis Paré notes that young people with better educated parents show more diversity in their sporting practices because they have easier access to expensive recreation and to activities away from the neighbourhood (1997: 74). In addition, young people from affluent homes are more active in artistic and cultural recreation. They are also more involved in recreational tourism (Gouvernement du Québec, 1994).[45]

The literature dealing with the impact of economic inequalities on youth participation in recreational activities sometimes employs social-class analysis to explain differences in participation levels among youth from diverse socioeconomic environments. Poverty, it seems, is not only a barrier in itself, it also erects many other barriers (Donnelly and Harvey, 1999). Thus, the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (1998) states that the number of barriers to recreational activities mentioned by young people decreases as family income rises.

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[44] Offord, Lipman and Duku (1998) note that only 35 percent of youth from low-income families reported that they had *ever* played a musical instrument, compared to 77 percent of middle-class youth. The number children from middle-class families who belonged to a hockey team was more than twice the number of children from poor families. Only 25 percent of poor children said that they had engaged in water sports, compared with 62 percent of middle class children. When youth from disadvantaged backgrounds take part in structured activities, they receive fewer awards than do middle-class youth. In the same vein, Peter McLaren's survey notes a strong income gradient in the participation of children and youth in organized recreation (1999: 4). Again, it would appear that young people have greater access to non-organized activities than to organized activities.

[45] A recent study on adult subjects shows similar results (Environics Research Group Limited, 2000).

The finding is a steady gradient (rather than a sharp break) in participation levels, from the highest to the lowest income category. Aware of the complexity and multidimensional nature of poverty, a range of authors maintain that holistic, integrated strategies are needed to produce greater participation by children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Offord, Hanna and Hoult, 1992; Jones and Offord, 1989; Donnelly and Harvey, 1996; Canadian Park and Recreation Association, 1999).

In reference to Donnelly and Harvey's typology, we note that there are few studies of the availability of facilities and equipment needed for participation. Offord, Lipman and Duku, however, have observed that the supply and availability of recreational programs are the determining factor in youth participation. "In the community domains, as would be expected, the presence of good parks, playgrounds, and play spaces in the neighbourhood was strongly associated with increased rates of participation in supervised sports, and to a [lesser] extent, in unsupervised sports and the arts" (1998: 22). However, this study constitutes an exception to the rule that the Canadian literature has not taken up this matter.

Superstructural Barriers to Participation in Structured Recreation

Overall, policies designed to meet the needs of the mainstream population have built-in superstructural barriers. These include the nature of the activities or services offered, the lack of information on available activities, exposure to outside influences, and cultural preconceptions about activities deemed appropriate for certain persons or groups (Donnelly and Harvey, 1996: 25). Superstructural barriers belong to the realm of ideas and perceptions. Discussions of them abound in the literature on youth access to recreation, and deal especially with factors related to age and gender.

Recreational activities take place in specific social contexts. Hence, factors such as age and gender constitute superstructural barriers to participation because they are the products of social representations dealing with the behaviours and types of recreation deemed acceptable for young people of a certain age or gender.

Age as a Limiting Factor

British researchers Leo Hendry and colleagues (1993) discuss three age-related stages that can be observed with respect to young people's recreation: (1) *organized recreation* such as group sports, which is most important between the ages of 13 and 14; (2) *casual recreation* that begins between the ages of 15 and 16, and includes "hanging out" with friends; and (3) *commercial recreation*, which is predominant around the age of 16, and includes going to cinemas, bars and pubs. During the commercial stage, young people start to spend more time in mixed gender environments. Thus, young people go through phases in terms of leisure, which seem to be accompanied by changes in interpersonal relations. Young people move from almost exclusively family-centred relationships in childhood, to peer-centred relationships in early adolescence, and then to relationships with the opposite sex in late adolescence (Hendry, *et al.*, 1993).

The study by Hendry, *et al.* was carried out on British and Scottish youth but Canadian researchers have recorded similar data. Jean Côté and John Hay (forthcoming) have developed a typology of the stages of involvement in sport, dealing specifically with recreational sport. Their findings also suggest that, from early childhood to late adolescence, there are three stages of participation in sport.

As a rule, children are more likely than adolescents to take part in and appreciate organized activities. As young people grow older, they are inclined to abandon organized activities in favour of informal activities. For example, an Ontario survey of children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 reveals that the rate of participation in organized leisure for children aged 6 to 9 is 86 percent. As children grow older, the participation rate drops, reaching 65 percent when they are aged 16 or 17. The rate of inactivity soars in youth aged 13 to 19, rising from 14 percent among 13-year-old girls to 60 percent among 19-year-old girls. For boys, it climbs from 7 percent when they are 13 years of age to 41 percent when they are 19 (McLaren, 1999). While it is true that participation in organized activities dramatically decreases with age for both genders, girls begin to withdraw from organized sport even earlier than boys. Their participation starts to slow at about 9 years of age versus age 12 for boys (McLaren, 1999: 6; Allison, quoted in Donnelly and Harvey, 1996: 28). However, we have not found any analysis of girls' early withdrawal from organized non-sporting activities.

Gender as a Limiting Factor

Studies investigating youth inactivity levels devote considerable attention to young girls. From the onset of adolescence, many young girls substantially reduce their physical activity, if they do not abandon it completely. In high school, 27 percent of girls in Quebec aged 14 to 16 are active, compared with 46 percent of boys of the same age (Kino-Québec, 1998: 4).[46]

Sociologists and other researchers interested in youth recreation focus a great deal on gender since it influences not only participation rates, but recreation choices as well. For the authors analyzing the effects of gender on recreation participation, the question is one of equity. In other words, how can equal opportunities be extended to all youth?

Compared to boys, girls seem less drawn to team sports and competition, and more likely to participate in cultural and interpersonal activities (Kino-Québec, 1999*a*: 7; McLaren, 1999; Gouvernement du Québec, 1994; Offord, Lipman and Duku, 1998; Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity, 1994; Dahlgren, 1988). Young girls exhibit lower self-esteem than boys both before and after engaging in recreational activities.[47]

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[46] A study by Kenneth, Allison and Edwards (1997) on Ontario adolescents reveals that 44 percent of girls aged 13 to 19 are sedentary, compared with 27 percent of boys in the same age group.

[47] In the literature, low self-esteem is often associated with a barrier to participation (Raymore, Godbey and Crawford, 1994). According to this reasoning, girls register a lower level of participation than boys because girls have lower self-esteem. However, we must remember that other variables (including the cultural context) are at work in this process. Thus, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of the self-esteem variable, since it is considered both a *product* of participation (as we have seen in section 1) and an *obstacle* to it. In addition, the authors see a link between the degree of self-esteem and socioeconomic status. Low self-esteem is mentioned more often by people from less privileged environments (Raymore, Godbey and Crawford, 1994). This example clearly illustrates the overlaps that occur in the literature dealing with constraints on participation.

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Girls are also less likely to see themselves as athletic, even when they have demonstrated the same level of physical activity as their male counterparts (Shaw, Kleiber and Caldwell, 1995; Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity, 1994). Girls cite substantially the same reasons as boys for engaging in physical activity, including personal enjoyment and companionship. Thus, most authors ascribe differences in participation between boys and girls to deeper cultural factors associated with the production and reproduction of gender roles in recreational activities (Coakley, 2001: 205).

There is a relatively extensive body of literature on the reproduction of feminine and masculine roles through participation in sports and recreation. Since the 1980s, studies have examined the evolving relationship between women and sport from an historical perspective. They have revealed numerous cultural factors associated with the production and reproduction of gender roles influencing recreation choices (Henderson, 1993; Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sports, 1994; White and Young, 1999; Saltzman and Kotarba, 1999; Burstyn, 1999; Greendorfer, Lewko and Rosengren, 1996).[48] Certain cultural norms seem to be internalized by girls in early childhood, discouraging them from developing their physical skills. Later on, as adults, these norms prevent them from enjoying physical activities that demand a higher level of physical skills (Kino-Québec, 1998).

Although most authors concede that much progress has been made and that girls now have more opportunities to participate, disparities in participation rates and recreation choices persist (Raymore, Godbey and Crawford, 1994; Shaw, Kleiber and Caldwell, 1995; Dunn, 1996). Parents are more conscious of the importance of encouraging their daughters as well as their sons to pursue physical activity. Girls are breaking into many sports once considered male bastions. However, boys are much more reluctant to engage in "typically feminine" activities.

The intrusion of a member of the opposite sex into sexually stereotyped activities still generates prejudices about and allusions to the "intruder's" sexual orientation. For this reason, Greendorfer, Lewko and Rosengren (1996) argue that many societal changes thought to be profound are, in reality, superficial.

These differences in behaviour reflect the vastly different life experiences of males and females. They should be taken into account when designing programs and promotional strategies for recreational activities for youth, which need to reach young people of both sexes. For many authors, participation by girls in sports raises a multitude of issues about combating stereotypes and encouraging girls to participate in more sports. Girls, it has been observed, prefer social and cooperative activities to competition, but few studies have tested the effect of programs that are supposedly better adapted to a female clientele. Further, we do not know whether sexual stereotypes persist in artistic and extracurricular activities, or in movements such as the Scouts, Guides, and Boys and Girls Clubs.

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[48] Some studies report that even when girls have as much skill as boys, they still feel that they are not up to par. Girls first have this feeling at the age of 6, when they have more or less the same skills as boys of the same age (Kino-Québec, 1999*a*: 9).

Other Superstructural Barriers Affecting Youth

Although gender is the superstructural barrier that has received the most attention from authors assessing youth participation in recreational activities, barriers associated with other ideas, stereotypes and perceptions are surely as important as the gender barrier (for example, ideas about "jocks" and "nerds"). Yet, there are scarcely any Canadian studies of these matters. The same is true for the additional barriers encountered by minority youth, young immigrants, Aboriginal youth, and youth with disabilities. Faced with their own special challenges, these groups have a compelling need for leisure and recreation, but few studies deal with these issues.

The studies by Winther (1993) and Hay and Shepard (1998), which examine the relationship between Aboriginal youth and recreation, are exceptions. For example, Hay and Shepard (1998) compared Aboriginal with non-Aboriginal students in southwestern Ontario. They found that Mohawk/Cayuga students were less physically active and had less positive perceptions of physical activity than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. The authors argue that Aboriginal people's assimilation into "white" culture results in lifestyle changes with negative consequences for health. They maintain that this is due to the change in physical activity required to participate in a different kind of economy. As a consequence, Aboriginal people who are now living a sedentary life have a high prevalence of chronic diseases associated with physical inactivity including diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease. For these reasons, educational institutions need to design physical activity programs that will encourage young people to exercise regularly. Winther's (1993) paper on Aboriginal youth in Manitoba concludes that physical activity, which has a prominent place in Aboriginal culture, could be an effective means of helping Aboriginal people while respecting their culture.

Similarly, the literature on the way youth with disabilities relate to structured recreation is practically nonexistent in Canada, even though there are data confirming that they face additional barriers (Offord, Hanna and Hoult, 1992; Valentine, forthcoming). In addition, some studies show that youth from disadvantaged backgrounds are subject to intolerance and discrimination at the hands of recreation service administrators (Jones and Offord, 1991; Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture of British Columbia, 1997; Reid, *et al.*, 1994).

Procedural Barriers to Participation in Structured Recreation

These limits emerge from the service delivery process and a lack of social support, not only from friends, family and members of the community in general, but also from the service delivery process. It can take the form of a failure to recognize citizens' rights to access services and recreational opportunities or can appear as rigid, inflexible management styles (Donnelly and Harvey, 1996). In the Canadian literature on youth and recreation, the influence of parents, friends and organizational structures are the most frequently discussed barriers of the third type.

The Influence of Peer Groups and Parents

All the authors agree that the influence of peer groups and parents is a determining factor for youth participation in structured recreation. However, there is little agreement over which group is more influential, parents or peers.

We know that peer pressure is particularly strong among adolescents, who seek acceptance (Kenneth, Allison and Edwards, 1997). Many authors stress the importance of friendship during adolescence (Hendry, *et al.*, 1993; Paré, 1997; Pronovost, 1997 and 2000). In 1986, Godin, Shepard and Colantonio recommended that the focus be placed on peer groups, rather than on parents, when encouraging physical activity among adolescents (cited in Anderssen and Wold, 1992). Peers could represent barriers as well as motivators to youth participation in structured recreation.

Other studies, however, show that parental support plays a pivotal role in encouraging youth to participate. There are various forms of parental support: verbal encouragement, covering the costs of the activity, and assisting with transportation (Greendorfer, Lewko and Rosengren, 1996: 94). Parents can also set an example. According to Frances Kremarik's (2000) study, based on the 1998 *General Survey on Time Use*, active youth are more likely than inactive youth to have parents who participate in sport.

Other studies have also examined the roles parents can play in their children's level of activity, but as yet no clear conclusions have emerged, especially regarding the situation in Canada.[49] Parental influence varies according to the type of recreation. McLaren notes that parents have more influence over the organized recreational activities of their children than over their non-organized recreational activities. This is probably due to the fact that organized activities require greater investments of time and money (McLaren, 1999).

In general, analyses of the impact of social context on youth recreation yield mixed results. As Greendorfer, Lewko and Rosengren note, the influence of parents and peers on children's recreational activity is probably more complex than we had originally assumed (Greendorfer, Lewko and Rosengren, 1996: 94).[50]

Several authors also note that gender affects the social support provided by peers and parents. This leads us to believe that the influence of peers and parents may also be highly conditioned by traditional sexual stereotypes and images (Kane, cited in Offord, Hanna and Hoult, 1992; Dunn, 1996; Greendorfer, Lewko and Rosengren, 1996).

Some authors have also remarked that the increase in structured recreation for youth has resulted in significantly greater adult influence (especially that of parents and instructors) on young people's recreational activities. According to many authors, young people are attracted to sports primarily because they find them pleasurable. Therefore, as Jean Côté and John Hay state, "negative experience with adult leaders such as coaches and parents is an important factor that helps explain the decrease in sport participation as children age.

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[49] A longitudinal Finnish study concludes that a father's level of physical activity is the most important influence on his children's future level of physical activity (Yang, Telama and Laakso, 1996). However, a Canadian survey notes that the influence of both the mother and the father seem to have an identical effect on the children's physical activity (Kremarik, 2000).

[50] Greendorfer, Lewko and Rosengren maintain that the studies assessing parental influence on youth participation have provided little evidence that would give us a better understanding of how young people become and remain physically active. Gender studies tend to reinforce the idea that sport provides different experiences for girls than for boys (1996: 94).

For instance, when children evolve through their socialization in sport, there are increased adult expectations for personal performance, physical excellence, and achievement" (Côté and Hay, forthcoming: 3-4.) Raymond Desharnais (1991) argues that undue pressure by adults (both parents and instructors) may result in young people withdrawing from sports activities because they are robbed of the enjoyment they normally derive.

Limits Emerging from the Service Delivery Process

The community can affect participation in structured activities through the level of support and ease of access it provides for recreational services. A number of authors maintain that the forms of service delivery can constrain youth participation in structured recreation. Organizational constraints often involve a failure to attend to the needs and wants of youth with regard to recreational matters. Ian Reid, *et al.* (1994) note that forms of organization and the supply of services for at-risk youth in 16 Canadian municipalities constitute barriers to youth participation, although the principal barrier seems to be lack of money.

The barriers identified by the Reid study are numerous. They include programs with objectives and missions that are too narrow and lack youth services; union agreements and budgets that limit business hours and services; and fear of liability action and the cost of liability insurance, which frequently prevent an organization from offering activities such as adventure-based programs and skateboarding areas. The rules and regulations of many agencies and facilities regarding personal behaviour were also recognized as a barrier.

Other constraints include insufficient coordination among the agencies responsible for providing youth services; the inability of decision-makers to understand the role and benefits of youth recreation; the short-term political horizons of various governmental authorities; the lack of qualified instructors; and the failure to understand the needs and desires of the principal stakeholders, youth themselves (Reid, *et al.*, 1994).

Young people who attended the five Youth Forums in British Columbia identified similar organizational barriers including program rigidity, lack of coordination among the agencies responsible for providing youth recreational services, and a general lack of regard for young people's needs and wants (Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture of British Columbia, 1997).

According to Offord and Jones, a lack of precision concerning the division of responsibilities of the various levels of government has worsened the situation. While the federal government's role is fairly vague, the provincial governments are responsible for funding but have few responsibilities regarding the supply of services as such. Municipalities are responsible for providing services to all children, but they have no clear mandate to promote equality of opportunity in this area.[51]

[51] A recent American study (conducted in Phoenix) also discussed these organizational constraints. The authors called into question the inflexibility of the municipal bureaucracy and recreation organizations, and deplored the breakdown in cooperation among the agencies responsible for youth services (Montiel, Hultsman and Armistead, 1997).

As a result, poor children often do not receive their fair share of recreation funding (cited in Offord, Hanna and Hoult, 1992).[52]

The Canadian literature examining organizational structures as barriers to participation focuses on the services provided at the municipal level. It does not evaluate other recreation providers such as schools and public or private organizations. Few Canadian studies examine the barriers to youth participation in school environments.[53] It would be interesting to determine if the privatization of youth recreational programs, a growing phenomenon in the United States, finds an echo in Canada and, if it does, to evaluate its impact on youth access to structured recreation (Coakley, 2001).[54]

Canadian researchers frequently focus on municipal recreational services and publicly financed services, which they regard as possible barriers to youth participation. Although the authors are unanimous in acknowledging the central role played by municipal recreational departments in providing youth services, very few studies concentrate on the relationship between the supply of public services and youth participation rates. The study by Offord, Lipman and Duku (1998) is an exception, as is the work by Gina Browne and colleagues (1998) on the supply of services to young people in families on social assistance. Above all, the Canadian literature on public services analyzes *access* to services, but not the *supply* of recreational services as such. This undoubtedly explains why the negative assessment of public services focuses on lack of access, but only to existing supply.

2.3 Changes in Lifestyles and the Future of Structured Recreation

Some authors have observed that changing lifestyles are having an effect on youth participation in structured recreation. The American researcher Jay Coakley and several British authors have noted that these trends, while not limiting activities directly, may make them less appealing. Many young people are now replacing structured or organized sports with alternative, non-structured, participant-controlled recreation such as skateboarding, in-line skating, snowboarding or biking (Coakley, 2001). This new trend appears to go beyond physical activities. It can be seen in other types of recreation, as demonstrated by the popularity of the Internet and video games (McLaren, 1999; Pons, Piette, Giroux, Millerand, 1998).

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[52] Offord and Jones's study of the municipalities of Hamilton and Ottawa shows that skill development tends not to be emphasized, and external evaluations of gains in skill levels are virtually non-existent. "In short, little or no accountability is built in for the personnel delivering these services" (cited in Offord, Hanna and Hoult, 1992). "The end result is that recreational services in Ontario are markedly class-linked; middleclass children receive them and poor children do not. The barriers which exclude poor children are several" (Ottawa Tenants' Council for Public Housing, cited in Offord, Hanna and Hoult, 1992).

[53] In the United States, Ralph McNeal (1999) notes that structural factors such as school size and pupil/teacher ratios, as well as contextual characteristics such as school climate, average economic status of the pupils, and number of children from single-parent families, seem to affect student participation in extracurricular activities.

[54] Coakley remarks that youth sport receives strong financial support from commercial and private organizations. However, he notes that public sector funding is decreasing. This trend is likely to further limit the access of youth from disadvantaged environments, since promoters are not guided by motives of equity or social redistribution (2001: 113). In Canada, some provincial governments are encouraging volunteer organizations to raise funds from the private sector to support youth recreational activities (Harvey and Thibault, 1996; Mahon, 2001).

According to McLaren's (1999) study, 75 percent of children in Ontario play video games and 90 percent play on the computer. Ontario youth also devote much more time to non-structured recreation than to structured recreation, and much more time to non-sport activities.[55] This trend raises questions about the ability of current recreational structures to meet youth's changing recreational needs, and about the impact of this new situation on young people's participation in structured recreation.[56]

Unfortunately, there is little literature on the lifestyle changes that are pulling youth toward non-structured recreational activities, often those emphasizing individualism and consumption.[57] As they grow older, young people are more inclined to get involved in commercial recreation, and social and cultural factors amplify this tendency. Some authors believe the trend is having a negative influence. They maintain, for example, that young people have become victims of the leisure industry,[58] and that they are becoming increasingly individualistic.[59] Others are more optimistic, describing young people as fairly enlightened about recreation consumption, and arguing that friendship and social activities remain a fundamental part of adolescents' lives (Paré, 1997; McLaren, 1999). The new trends – if they are in fact new – are opening up a vast area of study that until now has barely been addressed by researchers from the various disciplines.

Gaps in Knowledge

- The analysis of the effects of socialization on access to recreational activities is limited by the difficulty in analyzing a concept as complex as socialization. It is also limited by methodological difficulties.

- Determining the influence of gender and social support is difficult because it is impossible to isolate these variables. These difficulties lead to overlapping research on the constraints associated with youth participation. No study has really been able to deal with these problems.

- We do not know the long-term effects of barriers to participation. There is no longitudinal data to determine whether these constraints persist into adulthood.

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55 Young people may spend about 1,293 hours a year (or 26 hours a week) in non-organized and non-sporting recreation. They may spend 351 hours a year playing *non-organized* sports and 175 hours a year participating in *organized* sports (McLaren, 1999: 12).

56 The study by Pons, Piette, Giroux and Millerand (1998) leads us to believe that Internet use by high school students comes at the expense of other activities, such as watching television. It would be instructive to know whether structured recreation suffers because of Internet use.

57 British researchers such as Furlong and Cartmel (1997) and Jones and Wallace (1992) discuss this subject.

58 For Furlong and Cartmel, "the emergence of youth cultures in the post-war period can be linked to economic changes. Their development is closely linked to the relative affluence of youth and the ways they have been targeted by the fashion and music industries" (1997: 60).

59 Laberge and Thibault (1993) draw a link between the prevalence of doping among some young athletes and certain highly prized values in postmodern societies. An example of these values is the "cult of the individual," which gives exaggerated importance to individual interests and to winning at any cost.

- All the studies agree that the needs of youth living in poverty do not receive the same attention as those of other young people. Few studies identify the specific recreational needs of young people from disadvantaged environments. Even fewer suggest how to help these youth without stigmatizing them.

- There has been very little research on the specific problems of youth living in difficult circumstances, such as visible minority, Aboriginal, immigrant and disabled youth.

- We know that youth from single-parent families are less likely to take part in structured activities (Offord, Lipman and Duku, 1998; Ross, Roberts and Scott, 1998). However, few studies examine the impact of changes to the nuclear family on youth participation.

- Few Canadian studies attempt to identify participation constraints from the standpoint of the supply of services. We still do not know what impact access to publicly supported recreation services has on rates of participation in structured recreation, or on differential socioeconomic rates of participation.

- It would be interesting to know how the lower sports participation rates of girls affect the supply of recreational services for young girls. Since fewer girls take part in some activities, it might be hypothesized that there are fewer girls in the organizational structures and, consequently, that the programs offered do not meet girls' needs. Similar reasoning can be applied to minority youth.

- We do not know whether the changes associated with new lifestyles will persist into the future or whether they are only part of a vogue. Apart from vague speculation, we do not know the impact these changes will have on recreation, on its benefits, or on accessibility.

- Studies on barriers to participation focus primarily on identifying constraints. Very few studies describe how youth react when faced with these barriers. One study of Canadian youth finds that many young people are far from passive when confronted with constraints on their participation. They negotiate actively so that they can keep participating (Jackson and Rucks, 1995).

- Few studies have assessed the impact of the media on the recreational behaviour of youth. Therefore, we do not know whether the media are furthering or undermining young people's interest in structured recreation.

3.0 Implications for the Four Hypotheses

The Laidlaw Foundation originally developed four major hypotheses concerning the policy significance of youth recreation. Our findings and empirical observations lead to the following results. These are presented in three parts: access to structured recreation; impacts of recreation; and research implications.

3.1 Access to Structured Recreation – Correlates and Patterns

We can draw certain conclusions about *access* to structured recreation by age, gender, income, a range of other factors, and according to barriers that prevent participation. The literature shows the following about these correlates.

Age: Children are more likely than adolescents to take part in and appreciate organized activities. As young people grow older, they are inclined to abandon organized activities in favor of informal activities. While it is true that participation in organized activities dramatically decreases with age for both genders, girls begin to withdraw from organized sport even earlier than boys do.

Gender: Compared to boys, girls seem less drawn to team sports and competition, and are more likely to participate in cultural and interpersonal activities. Girls cite substantially the same reasons as boys for engaging in physical activity, including personal enjoyment and companionship. Most authors ascribe differences in participation between boys and girls to deeper cultural factors associated with the production and reproduction of gender roles in recreational activities. Certain cultural norms seem to be internalized by girls in early childhood, preventing them from developing their physical skills. Later on, as adults, these norms prevent them from enjoying physical activities that demand a higher level of physical skills. Although most authors concede that much progress has been made and that girls now have more opportunities to participate, disparities in participation rates and recreation choices persist. Girls are breaking into many sports once considered male bastions. However, boys are much more reluctant to engage in "typically feminine" activities.

Income: Young people identify lack of money and difficulty in accessing activities as major barriers to their participation. Researchers similarly identify economic inequalities as one of the major factors that shape patterns of youth participation. The number of barriers to recreational activities mentioned by young people decrease as family income rises. There are significant differences in levels of participation between youth from low-income families and those from middle- and high-income families. Participation in physical and artistic activities is particularly low and irregular for children from low-income families. The differences are greater for structured recreation and for recreation that requires elements of instruction or expensive equipment. Municipal recreation user fees discourage participation by youth from low-income families since costs are a more acute problem for them.

Other Factors: A number of other factors can also influence youth participation in structured recreation:

- Urban/Rural Living: More often than not, inactive children and adolescents live in communities with fewer than 1,000 residents. Some research findings can suggest that small municipalities are less successful than larger municipalities in meeting young people's needs for physical activities.
- Minority Youth: Young immigrants, Aboriginal youth, and youth with disabilities face particular and additional barriers to participation in structured recreation.
- Time Constraints: Many youth identify lack of time and competitive time demands as barriers to their participation.
- Parental Influence: Active youth are more likely than inactive youth to have parents who participate in sport. Parental influence varies according to the type of recreation. Parents have more influence over the organized recreational activities of their children than over their non-organized recreational activities.
- Peer Influence: Peers could represent barriers as well as motivators to youth participation in structured recreation.
- Changing Lifestyles: Many young people are now replacing structured or organized sports with alternative, non-structured, participant-controlled recreation. This new trend appears to go beyond physical activities, as demonstrated by the popularity of the Internet and video.

Infrastructural Barriers: In a Canadian study, the presence of good parks, playgrounds, and play spaces in the neighbourhood was strongly associated with increased rates of participation in supervised sports and, to less a lesser extent, in unsupervised sports and the arts. Forms of service delivery can affect youth participation in structured recreation. Organizational constraints often involve a failure to attend to the needs and wants of youth with regard to recreational matters, program rigidity, lack of coordination among the agencies responsible for providing youth recreational services, and a general lack of regard for young people's needs and wants. The lack of precision concerning the division of responsibilities of the various levels of government seems to have worsened the situation.

3.2 Impacts of Recreation – Positive and Negative

Present Impacts

Immediate Physical Outcomes: The immediate impacts of recreational activity on youth physical and biological development are numerous. However, the literature in the health sciences, which is the primary source of information on youth physical and biological development, does not differentiate between structured and non-structured activities, so we cannot distinguish between the physical outcomes related to structured and non-structured recreation.

Physical activity as an important impact of growth and maturation of youth. It has been found that physical activity generates greater skeletal mineralization, greater bone density and increased bone mass and flexibility. Physical activity is an important factor in the regulation of body mass. There is also a positive correlation between physical activity, increased muscle strength, motor fitness and aerobic capacity. Regular physical activity declines the risk of coronary disease for youth at-risk. But health problems such unintentional injuries can arrive during sporting activities. Delays in maturation and menstrual dysfunction can also be produced by too intense physical activity practices.

Immediate Psychosocial Outcomes: For the psychosocial impact of *structured recreation*, a positive correlation was found between recreation such physical activity, structured outdoor programs and extra-curricular activities increased self-esteem, self-concept, acceptance among peers, and self-empowerment. Physical activity can also have an impact on the development of cognitive functions. It has been found that participation in structured recreation is less likely than non-participation to be associated with deviant behaviour and negative relationship was demonstrated between participation in extra-curricular activities and dropping out school. We have also seen that structured recreation decreases boredom, a factor linked to the development of deviant and unhealthy behaviour. This is maybe an explanation of the link between participation in recreation and lower rates of delinquency. But highly competitive sports activities or following vigorous training programs can also produce negative psychosocial effects such burnout and high stress levels. In some case, physical activity may be associated with a distorted body image and an unrealistic desire to lose weight.

For *non-structured recreation* and its impact on psychosocial development, a positive correlation was found between recreation such physical activity and increased self-esteem, self-concept, acceptance among peers, and self-empowerment. A positive correlation was also found between participation in unsupervised sports and in artistic activities and a reduce rate of psychosocial problems among children and youth. But, as with structured recreation, physical activity may be associated with a distorted body image and an unrealistic desire to lose weight among young girls.

Immediate Civic Outcomes: Finally, some civic outcomes are associated with *structured recreation*. High-risk youth can benefit from the positive effects deriving from structured activities (such martial arts) if the activity includes a cognitive and social component. It has been found that participation in structured recreation has been seen as beneficial to moral development to the extent that behaviour, attitudes and decisions all draw attention to moral considerations. But some authors argue that *non-structured recreation* is more likely to give rise to moral behaviour, inasmuch as the child is directly involved in decision-making.

Future Impacts

Future Physical Outcomes: Again, the health sciences literature does not differentiate between structured and non-structured activities, so we cannot distinguish between future physical outcomes related to structured and non-structured recreation. Nonetheless, participation in physical activity can produce some future impacts on youth physical outcomes.

Physical activity among youth suffering from obesity can play an important role in lowering the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases during adulthood and limiting the risk to develop hypertension in the future. The impact of physical activity on the cardiovascular health of children considered to be at risk can be reversible, and the risk could not persist in the future unless the physical activity is curtailed in adulthood.

Future Psychosocial Outcomes: Some authors speculate that psychosocial outcomes developed in younger children will persist over the life-course. However, we have not found any research that conclusively links recreational activity in youth – structured or non-structured – to future psychosocial outcomes.

Future Civic Outcomes: Relating to future civic competencies, a positive correlation was found between participation in extracurricular activities and political involvement in adulthood, and between involvement in youth and religious organizations and community involvement in adulthood.

3.3 Research and Policy Implications Related to the Four Hypotheses

To recap, the four major hypotheses set out by the Laidlaw Foundation concerning the policy significance of youth recreation are:

1. ***The Human Development Hypothesis***: The absence of structured recreation for youth negatively affects the long run socio-emotional human development of youth as adults.

2. ***The Civic Competence Hypothesis***: The absence of involvement by youth in interpersonal recreation activities affects an individual's future civic competence and also affects the quality of democracy.

3. ***The Insufficiency Hypothesis***: Significant numbers of youth are not participating in recreation activities at levels sufficient to support their human development and future civic competence.

4. ***The Inadequacy Hypothesis***: Non-participation by youth in recreation and arts activities can be related to the inadequacy of existing public systems dealing with the provision of youth recreation.

It is almost impossible, due to the way the literature is structured, to answer the hypotheses, which are set out by the Laidlaw Foundation in the negative, that is, in terms of the *absence* of participation in structured recreation, for two reasons. First, looking only at the absence of participation leaves too many unanswered questions about the effects of participation. Second, and more important, the literature quite exclusively frames participation in the positive. Therefore, we do not know the impact of non-participation on human development – physical or psychosocial – except, in part, for biological development. Neither can we assess the effects of non-participation on the development of civic competencies.

Moreover, the hypotheses are framed in the long term, saying that non-participation affects *future* civic development or long-run socio-emotional human development. Because of the serious lack of longitudinal studies, we cannot draw evidence-based conclusions about the long-term effects of *participation* on youth socio-emotional or civic development. Nor do we know if constraints limiting youth participation have effects that persist throughout the life course. We can say even less about the long-term impacts of *non-participation* and can neither support nor refute the hypothesis that insufficient participation will ultimately affect the quality of democracy. Research on the collective and social consequences of youth participation in recreation could be a way to analyze these questions to determine if recreation can be seen as a public good.

Many of the deficiencies in the research stem from the nature of psychosocial development itself. It is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by many factors. Therefore, recreation is likely to have an essentially *indirect* impact on it. Except for physical and biological development, there are many *causal* variables but only positive and negative *correlations* between participation in some kinds of activities and youth development. Also, the current literature does not provide us with information about the *level* of activity required to obtain positive outcomes for either human development or the development of civic competencies.

Relating to the ***Human Development Hypothesis***, adolescence constitutes a critical period in the development of identity formation and self-concept. However, there are very few studies that describe the way that recreation can influence this process. We have seen that structured recreation can foster positive lifestyle choices among youth and, in some cases, can help reduce delinquency and dropping out of school. Some researchers argue that it is less expensive to set up recreation programs than it is to pay the eventual social costs of not setting them up. Future research could look at circumstances that influence the development of positive attitudes among youth.

Instead of looking for *moral development* through structured recreation, the literature told us that we should look at activities, circumstances and environments that encourage moral development. We should be able to say that certain activities such the Scout movement and structured outdoor programs are more likely to promote moral development or civic competencies, but this has not been a focus of Canadian researchers. Adult attitudes (i.e., coaches and parents) have also been found to play a significant role in the way that youth acquire moral skills through recreation, and this role should be further explored.

The importance of diversity in structured recreation for helping to develop different kinds of skills (social, emotional, civic or moral skills) has not been analyzed in the literature. Neither has the balance between the level of structured and unstructured recreation that is needed to obtain certain skills. In general, we can say that, in Canada, not much attention has been paid to recreation at all, despite the fact that it may turn out to be a critically important means of acquiring socio-emotional and civic skills. This absence of information does not permit us to draw any definitive conclusions about the ***Civic Competence Hypothesis***.

Relating to the ***Insufficiency Hypothesis***, we have seen that significant number of youth face multiple barriers to participation, among them youth from poor economic backgrounds, young girls, and young people from minority groups. All the studies agree that the needs of youth living in poverty do not receive the same attention by public services as those of other young people, but few studies identify the specific recreational needs of young people from disadvantaged environments. Even fewer suggest how public services can help these youth without stigmatizing them. Aware of the complexity and multidimensional nature of poverty, a range of authors maintain that holistic, integrated strategies are needed to produce greater participation by children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Municipal recreation user fees discourage participation by youth from low-income families and, in some provinces, user fees are widespread and, in certain cases, have increased. A re-examination of user fee policies could be part of the answer to equalizing access to structured recreation.

We have also seen that gender is still the cause of differences in participation in structured recreation. The persistence of sexual stereotypes should be taken into account when designing programs. If we see equal access to recreation as a social goal, the development of promotional strategies for recreational activities for youth from both sexes should be part of the political agenda.

As well, we have seen that the Canadian literature on public services analyzes *access* to services, but not the *supply* of recreational services as such. This undoubtedly explains why the negative assessment of public services focuses on lack of access, but only to existing supply. We found that the presence of good parks, playgrounds and play spaces in the neigbourhood was an important factor in rates of participation. We do not know, however, what impact access to publicly supported recreation services has on rates of participation in structured recreation, or on differential socioeconomic rates of participation. More research on recreational supply is required to have a better idea of the structured recreation that is available to youth. It is a prerequisite to knowing the implications of the ***Inadequacy Hypothesis***, which attributes the non-participation of youth to the inadequacy of existing public systems in dealing with the provision of youth recreation.

Limits emerging from the service delivery process challenge governmental practices in it. Organizational constraints seem numerous. There is not a clear mandate to promote equality of opportunity in recreation and the lack of precision in the division of responsibilities of the various levels of governments makes the situation even worse. Authors call for greater flexibility in administering and developing recreational programs; enhanced accessibility to programs in terms of costs, transportation and availability; and, above all, greater awareness of the needs and desires of youth. Also, changing lifestyles and the increased popularity of non-structured recreation raises questions about the ability of current recreational structures to meet youth's changing recreational needs, and about the impact of this new situation on young people's participation in structured recreation.

4.0 Conclusions from the Literature Review

We organized our literature review around two aspects of the relationship between young people (aged 10 to 15 years) and structured recreation. The first consisted of identifying the effects of recreation on the physical and psychosocial development of youth, and the second involved identifying factors affecting youth participation in structured recreation. The link between the two was as follows: If participating in structured recreation has a beneficial effect on the physical and psychosocial development of youth, then access to participation should be extended to all children. In this regard, David Offord, Ellen Lipman and Eric Duku state, "The first issue that must be addressed in the policy domain is whether or not participation in sports, arts and community programs is beneficial for children. If it is not, then the issue of unequal participation rates in different subgroups of children should not be of concern" (1998: 24).

With respect to identifying the effects of recreation on the physical and psychosocial development of youth, we have observed a significant difference between the conclusions of the scientific literature and widespread notions about recreation as a factor in development. While the evidence relating to physical and biological outcomes is scientifically grounded, the evidence relating to psychosocial outcomes is much less so. We therefore obtain mixed results.

Due to the methodological weaknesses of available studies, many influential authors are reluctant to say that recreation produces positive (or negative) effects on personality development, moral development or social values. In part, of course, the deficiencies in the research stem from the nature of psychosocial development itself. It is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by many factors. Therefore, recreation is likely to have an essentially *indirect* impact on it.

It is apparent, however, that there are positive physical, psychological and social benefits to be derived from *structured recreation*. Authors in the field share a general assessment of the positive effects of structured recreation on youth development. Overall, the observation is that the relationship between youth recreation and benefits is more complex than we might expect, and researchers stress the need for additional research that will yield more conclusive results.

Indeed, if we agree that structured recreation can generate *positive* outcomes, we are much less confident about the conditions that will engender such benefits. Structured recreation does not necessarily lead automatically to positive outcomes, and the acquisition of benefits depends largely on participation in appropriate programs, and on the social environment in which the activity takes place. As Wankel and Berger (1991) remind us, it is futile to wonder whether sport is good or bad. Like many things, sport is neither good nor bad in itself but can produce positive and negative effects. Thus, the following questions must be asked. What are the conditions that will generate positive outcomes? What conditions should be avoided in order to minimize negative effects?

With regard to identifying factors affecting youth participation in structured recreation, it is important to recall that there are many overlaps in the literature that deals with barriers to participation. It seems that both *socioeconomic status* and *gender* are key determining factors for youth participation but others are also important, such as the organizational structure of recreational services and the influence of peers and parents.

Yet authors have some difficulty weighting and categorizing these factors. For example, the variable of gender can cloud the influence of peers or parents. Also, some constraints may be more important for some young people, and less so for others. Again, the methodological deficiencies of the studies arise largely because of the difficulty of analyzing, not to mention isolating, some variables. The socioeconomic status variable, for example, is easier to observe than the diffuse, less tangible effects associated with gender.

There is a serious lack of research on the effects of publicly provided services on youth participation in structured recreational activities. Very few studies in Canada examine either if access to publicly supported recreation services affects participation in structured recreation in adolescence or if there are differences in participation according to socioeconomic status. However, recommendations for giving a greater number of young people access to recreation often originate in the study of constraints and barriers to youth participation. In general, authors call for greater flexibility in administering and developing recreational programs; enhanced accessibility to programs in terms of costs, transportation and availability; and, above all, greater awareness of the needs and desires of the principal stakeholders – youth.

Gaps in Knowledge and Recommendations

- There is a lack of systematic research on the effects of *structured recreation* on children and adolescents. Most studies simply do not take the distinction between structured and unstructured recreation into account. This holds true especially for the health sciences literature.

  Recommendation: Research comparing the potentially different effects of structured and unstructured recreation would help to fill this gap. Such distinctions are important because of competing hypotheses. A "social capital" hypothesis, for example, would make no distinction between structured and unstructured recreation because, in that literature, it is the *interaction* that matters. Hypotheses about the effects of peers and interaction with adults, in contrast, would see the distinction between structured and unstructured recreation as relevant.

- Studies on physical activities and sports dominate the literature on youth and structured recreation. There are few Canadian studies of other kinds of structured recreation such as artistic endeavors, hobbies and clubs, or of movements such as Scouts, Guides, and Boys and Girls Clubs, although many of these activities specifically emphasize the development of social skills and civic competencies. While the lack of studies is proving to be less critical with respect to extracurricular and outdoor activities, it is very important in the case of artistic activities.

Recommendation: Research on non-sport recreation, and comparisons of sports with other forms of recreation would make a significant contribution to knowledge. Evidence-based information about the contributions of all kinds of recreation is important in these times of limited budgets. Such information is all key to thinking about the kinds of partnerships that could be forged with the voluntary sector in order to advance an agenda of inclusion and citizenship.

- There is a lack of longitudinal data on youth and structured recreation. We do not know the long-term effects of recreation on youth development, nor do we know if constraints that shape patterns of youth participation have effects that persist throughout life. Researchers agree that there is a general need for longitudinal studies on youth participation in structured recreation.

  Recommendation: Research on the cross-time effects of recreation is key to understanding and making policy conclusions in this area. While it is true that longitudinal studies are expensive and require time, it is possible to collect more detailed information from adults about their recreational activities as young people in order to begin mapping this area. Such evidence is obviously important if civic competencies and social capital are to become the focus of attention.

- Studies of "youth and recreation" generally focus on individual outcomes and much less on the collective consequences of youth participation in recreation. Analysis of the economic costs of physical inactivity is almost the only exception. Focusing only on the individual outcomes of recreation gives rise to a knowledge gap in research on recreation as a public good, as a citizen right, and as a way to foster social cohesion and healthy democracy. Perceiving recreation as an essentially individual activity is undoubtedly one of the reasons that there are few studies on the supply of public recreational services as a factor influencing participation levels.

  Recommendation: It is important to re-conceptualize recreation as a collective good. This involves a certain amount of theoretical work, building on the very limited Canadian studies but the more prevalent European studies that analyze recreation in these ways. It also involves careful empirical work to bridge levels of analysis, from micro to macro. Successful work of this type would constitute a major contribution to recasting the public agenda around recreation.

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